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SEPTEMBER 21, 1984

THE END OF CATHOLICISM?
(Not yet.)

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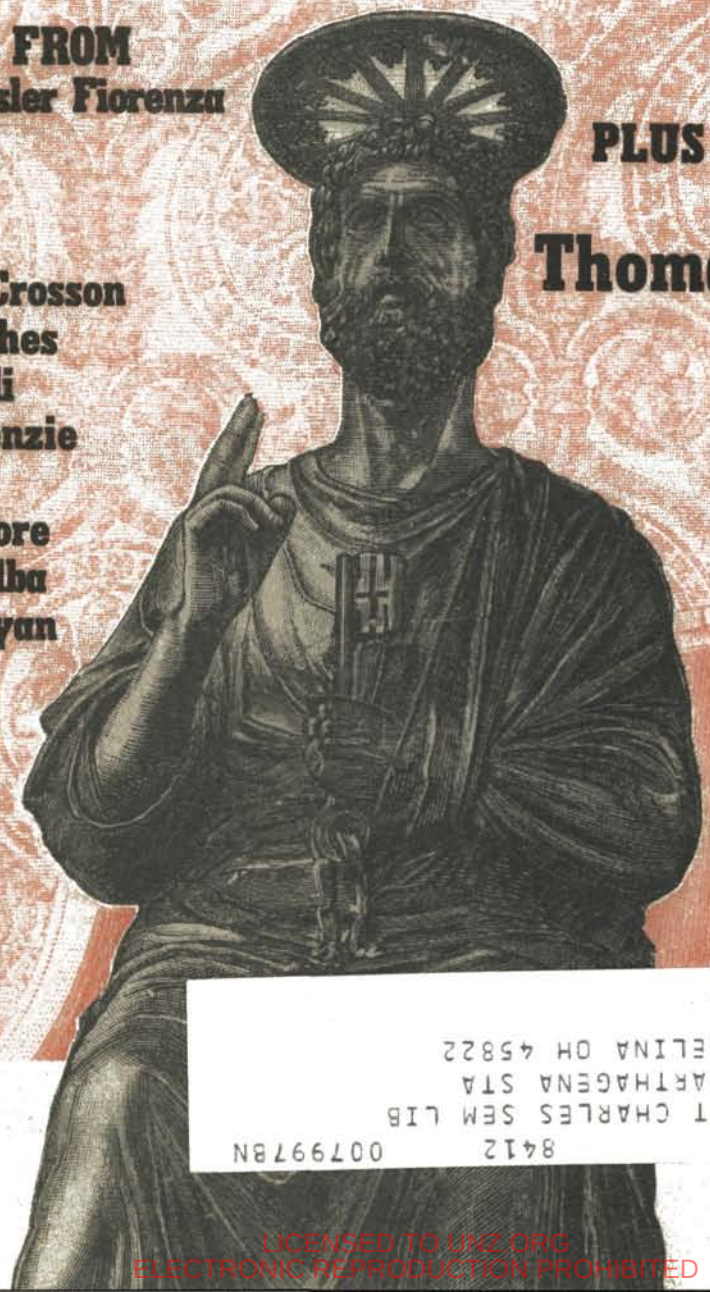

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Correspondence

Aye, there's the rub-out

Albuquerque, N. Mex.

To the Editors: Robert Bell's "Take My Wife, Please" [13 July] was the funniest bit of political commentary yet to appear on the 1984 election in any magazine or newspaper that's fallen under these poor old eyes.

If Bell is not rubbed out by the New Jersey Mafia as a result of that piece, you should sign him on as a regular columnist.

WILLIAM C. DOWLING

Chill in the church

Dallas, Tex.

To the Editors: I enjoyed your editorial "Polarization in the Church" [May 18]: clear, firm — and civil — which is more than one can say for the *Concilium* manifesto in the *New York Times*. The 'polarizations' which you point out and others you did not mention have worried me now for a long time. For example, there are still many Catholics who continue to read the conciliar decree on ecumenism in its original progressive intent, but many others in high places, who are reading it in as conservative a way as the text allows. The Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity used to be an anteroom to the Apostolic Palace; now it is barely hanging on down there on the Via dei Corridori. John Paul II is a gracious, open-hearted man and many of his visions are heart-lifting (e.g., distributive justice); but his idea of Christian unity seems to be the return of the rest of us to the Roman communion, made as cordial and hospitable as possible. And the "bilateral dialogues" are languishing, even with the Anglicans. This is not to overlook the multitude of lapses and forfeited *kairoi* on the part of the Protestants. It is only to add to the list of issues on which many of the Christian people are a good way ahead of many of their leaders.

But here is where I take a certain kind of muted courage. It was in Rome that I first learned how the principle of subsidiarity allowed for loyal and benign subversion, and I began to suspect even then that the images of a massive hierarchical pyramid, with a "trickle-down theory" of ecclesiastical authority were facades for a far more chaotic and creative reality. Since then, the conviction has grown that the Roman Catholic church comes nearer being run "from below upward" (and from "the middle") than "from above downward." Moreover, the phenomenal spread of new notions about anti-bureaucratic management (as in Peters and Waterman, *In Search of Excellence*) has confirmed my suspicion that even if Max Weber was right in his time about the virtues of pyramidal bureaucracy, the notion is now outmoded (in the churches, civil states, and elsewhere).

This means that notions that our future is being shaped from Rome (or 475 Riverside, for that matter) need transvaluation. Loyalty and faithful obedience do not entail self-stultification. Surely this is what the Vatican II heroes (Rahner, Congar, Murray, Lonergan) taught us — and they were not "Protestants," either. I have been saying now for twenty years that Vatican II let the genie of "Christian liberty" *(not* "private judgment"!) out of the bottle and it will never be fully stoppered again. Without defiance or schism, it is possible to appeal to "higher authority" (i.e., the pope in council) as guidance in one's vocation, and still be truly obedient in that vocation. Now is the time when the council texts begin to be significant in a new way to a new generation that scarcely remembers John XXIII and the early years of Paul VI.

Looking around today, I see many Catholics suffering a sense of victimization. I think their pride and expectations have been more severely wounded than their vocations and their freedom to follow those vocations within the leeways of discretion and "subsidiarity." All the alternatives are worse!

ALBERT OUTLER

Tolerating repression

Madison, Wis.

To the Editors: D.H. Richter's review of *November 1918: A German Revolution* [May 18] should provoke some disturbing reflections.

The depiction of Friedrich Ebert as a fence-sitter between the bad guys of the left and the bad guys of the right misses the significance of the events in Germany at the end of the First World War. Ebert's accommodation with Prussian militarism reveals the permanent crisis of the twentieth century. The willingness of democratic regimes to accommodate themselves with totalitarian elements in an effort to preserve "the republic" has ensured the persistence of repression and world conflict.

The illusion of a fresh start in the Weimar Republic bears much similarity to the evolution of the post-World War II order. Certainly, the principles for which America stands were flouted by the soft treatment given fascist businessmen and the employment of ex-Nazis as Communist hunters. The restoration to preeminence of the erstwhile slavers of the managing board of IG Farben, and Klaus Barbie's American-aided flight from justice are two well-known examples of American complicity with fascists in a spirit of anti-Communism.

The evolution of German fascism out of a social-democratic regime in the inter-war period is perhaps one of the most frightening legacies of the twentieth century. The ease with which American policy-makers support repression in the third world, and our postwar behavior, too, suggest that Ebert's example is more relevant than some might imagine.

PHILIP BECKERT

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Contents

Volume CXI, Number 16

Correspondence 482

Editorials 483

Rules for liberals: *David R. Carlin, Jr.* 486

'Christ Among Us': *John Garvey* 487

The End of Catholicism?: Responses: *Peter Chirico, J.M. Cameron, Frederick J. Crosson, Robert Imbelli, John Jay Hughes, Anne Carr, Richard J. Sklba, Loring W. Batten, III, Sebastian Moore, Gerard S. Sloyan, Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, Jack Miles, John L. McKenzie* 490

On Satan & Catholic liberals: *Thomas Sheehan* 498

Fr. Greeley's agnosticism: *Thomas Sheehan* 501

New houses from schoolhouses: *J.S. Fuerst & Sam Mancuso* 502

Screen: *Tom O'Brien* 502

Books

The Unraveling of America/A Time of Passion/Troubled Journey: *Jim Sleeper* 506

The Return of Martin Guerre: *Stephen Wagley* 510

West with the Night: *David Toolan* 511

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MR. REAGAN'S CIVIL RELIGION

PRESIDENT Reagan has called for a rebirth of faith? But what faith? Right-wing Christian fundamentalism, say his critics. Not quite, although that is part of it. When Mr. Reagan goes before B'nai B'rith and applauds a renewed concern for Jewish identity; when he first links politics, morality, religion, and government's need for the church, then warns against intolerance and celebrates the fact that there is a wall between church and state guaranteeing all Americans' rights to their own religious beliefs or to no belief at all, he is not acting the political hypocrite, as his critics aver. Mr. Reagan is sincere, and he even comes close to being consistent. What his opponents don't recognize is that he is not promoting religion in the sense of the many particular faiths that we know in America. He is preaching something else, and that something is *civil religion*. His own version of it.

The idea of a civil religion — a generalized faith that binds together the nation and links the national purpose to some higher or deeper reality — has been batted about among observers of the American scene for some time now. What they see has many ingredients: Protestant "civic piety," the Founding Fathers' belief in a somewhat Deist Providence, evangelical fervor and the democratic "faith in the common man," with its W.P.A. icons. Our civil religion has its rituals and obligations — on the Glorious Fourth, on Memorial Day, in presidential inaugural addresses. For some observers it is a necessary social glue that holds together a wildly disparate people; for others it is an authentic religious form that places the nation, for self-understanding and judgment, in a transcendental framework. For still others, it is a shallow celebration of the American Way of Life. We are among those who think it contains all these possibilities. It can be inclusive — providing a common language, part religious, part secular, so Americans of different outlooks can adequately voice their deepest convictions. And it can be exclusive, both of those Americans whose own languages it refuses to accommodate and of the rest of the world. It can be critical — as in the appeals of reformers from Thoreau to Martin Luther King, Jr. And it can be complacent — congratulating ourselves on material wealth or military might. It can be a vehicle for other faiths, assisting them into the public forum. Or it can be their rival, subverting their particular challenge in a miasma of "Americanism."

Civil religion has been transformed as new groups of believers and nonbelievers have claimed their rightful places in what was once a Protestant "overculture." The religion faded, and the strictly civic expanded. How many citizens could even understand the theological anguish of Lincoln's Second Inaugural today? JFK, at his inaugural, declared the nation's "belief that the rights of man come not from the generosity of the state but from the hand of God." Lyndon Johnson chose to declare the U.S. a "nation of believers" in more secular terms: "we are believers in justice and liberty and union. . . . And we believe in ourselves."

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Not a few Americans have felt excluded by this shift. It seemed that their way of thinking and talking was no longer part of legitimate public discourse, at least on the national level. Unwilling to recognize how older forms of the civil religion were not, in truth, neutral but gave their own brand of Christianity a privileged status, they now found themselves frustrated by a secular "overculture" whose proponents were often equally unwilling to allow that it, too, might not be neutral but leave distinctly secular outlooks "more equal than others." The story is more complicated, of course; and the resolution not at all easy — or in sight. But the immediate fact is that President Reagan has understood this sense of grievance, as the Democrats have not, and exploited it. By appearing before sectarian groups, by announcing prayer weeks and Bible years, by endorsing an interpretation of recent history as enforced secularization, he has presided over the civil religion in such a way as to unmistakably give back to those Americans their share in it.

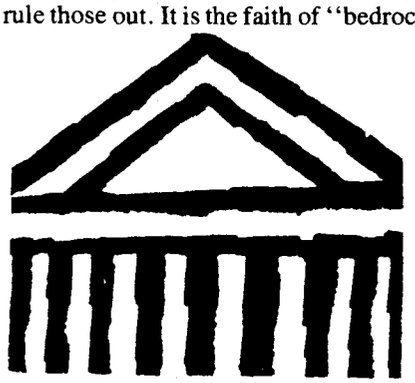
It is possible to see something inclusive and democratically healthy in this — and also much that is opportunistic and dangerously demagogic. Reagan's attribution of secularization to malign courts is a gross distortion of a process that has had numerous valid sources. His suggestion that all opponents of his version of civil religion are "attacking religion" and intolerant is shockingly unfair. Yet if one views the matter not from Smalltown, U.S.A., but from a cultural capital like New York, there *is* a striking amount of intolerance toward religious belief, and it *is* particularly frustrating because it is frequently displayed by those who hold themselves as models of tolerance and openmindedness.

Occasionally this intolerance surfaces rudely, as in a recent editorial of *The Nation*, a venerable journal of the doctrinaire left. Referring to "the essentially authoritarian straitjacket of religion," it quoted Diderot: "Mankind shall not be free until the last king is strangled with the entrails of the last priest." That, one supposes, passes for pleasantry at *The Nation*. One can only imagine how lighthearted that journal's mini-Diderots would be if Jerry Falwell charmingly announced that he looked forward to the day when the last Commie dictator was boiled in the juices of the last secular humanist.

More often, however, such intolerance toward religious belief takes the forms blacks and women have known so well: stereotyping, condescension, dismissal, ignorance, neglect. Religion is caricatured in history books, left out of TV documentaries on public issues, presented in stock negative images by columnists and editorialists, treated as a curiosity, or welcomed when it is "our kind," i.e., "progressive." Early this month, the *New York Times* ran a fairly comprehensive, medium-sized news story outlining the positions of the major religions toward abortion — only eleven years after *Roe v. Wade*! The *Times*, which regularly displays an extraordinary capacity for both obtusity and superiority when dealing with matters that touch upon religion, greeted the president's latest foray with an editorial headed "Oh So Sure They're Right." The danger in all this religion-in-politics business, the editorial warned, "comes from people who are oh so sure they're right, who insist that they alone represent the one true political faith, who revile the other side as godless, intolerant obstructionists." We couldn't agree more, except that it may come as a surprise to the *Times* that, minus the word "godless," this shoe would sometimes fit their own editorial foot. If things have improved recently, the sad fact is that the new attention probably owes more to the militancy of the Jerry Falwells than to the tolerance and sensitivity of the national media.

All this explains how it is possible to see something positive when Ronald Reagan sends the liberal editorialists into a dither. Something, maybe, but not too much. The destructive side of Reagan's forays into civil religion is revealed in its political centerpiece — "voluntary" organized prayer in the public schools. This proposal is simply double-talk and a real threat to conscience. It is, in our view, completely unlike questions about Christmas crèches, "equal access" for high-school religious groups, chaplains for state legislatures, religious themes on postage stamps, and a host of other issues about which we could live comfortably with considerable give-and-take. Why — besides the obvious political capital — cannot the president see this?

The reason is, again, his particular version of civil religion. In an odd sense, Mr. Reagan is a Jeffersonian. Jefferson thought that underneath the surface of sectarian differences, the *real* message of his day's religions was pretty much the same, and as Enlightenment reason dispelled the obscurities of priestcraft, this common denominator would become clear. Mr. Reagan is no *philosophe*, but in his own way he thinks much the same. When he welcomes a "rebirth of faith," it is not the faith of the Talmud or the faith of Jesus' death and resurrection that he appears to have in mind, though no doubt he wouldn't rule those out. It is the faith of "bedrock values,"



of "hard work" and "family" and "strength and purposefulness in our foreign relations." It is the faith of productivity at home, assertion abroad, and a vague divinity whose major function is to make us feel good about ourselves.

At this point, whatever service the president's civil religion performs in reintroducing an alienated segment of believing Americans into public life is outweighed by the subversion it works on authentic religion — the kind that not only can celebrate family, hard work, and "strength and purposefulness in our foreign relations" but believes that even these things stand under God's judgment. There is something downright frightening about a civil religion in which the chant "U.S.A.! U.S.A.!" plays such a prominent part, Mr. Rea-

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gan's civil religion, self-congratulatory and sentimental, turns out not to be an umbrella under which our particular beliefs can flourish; it turns out to be the ardent elevation of the American Way of Life, of which our particular beliefs are presumed to be only superficial variations. We demur. We are ready to love and serve our nation but not worship it. Yes, ours is a jealous God.

GETTING OFF SLEAZY ST.

Sleaze. No one seems to be sure about the derivation of the word, but it is undoubtedly a good one. Onomatopoetic. Suggestive. Like *slime* and like *grease*, hard to get hold of, but also hard to get rid of. Like *slippery*, as in down the slippery slope. Like *disease* — unfortunately infectious. Like *squeeze*, which is sometimes what the practitioners of sleaze do, and in the past tense is probably how someone accused of sleaze feels.

What is sleaze? Well, it's a category that includes crime — self-interested, grasping crime — and also not-quite-crime — practices that tread just within the boundary of legality but which indicate a manipulation of the rules to escape their proper purposes. Originally used in the textile trade, sleazy means flimsy, insubstantial. Perhaps the best sign of sleaze is the kind of alibis it generates: strained, prevaricating, obfuscating.

Obviously sleaze is a broad category. So let us try to distinguish. There is Sleaze^1 and Sleaze^2. Sleaze^2 is what J. Patrick Dobel wrote about in "The Political Philosophy of Sleaze" [July 13] — bending the standards of public service to fit the ethos of private gain. Sleaze^2 consists in shady private behavior, not involving any public office. Sleaze^1 is a direct assault on the public trust; Sleaze^2 raises questions about a person's fitness for assuming such a trust.

Sleaze is one of the few things in American politics that is genuinely bipartisan, as Democrats, who were complaining quite rightly but also a bit self-righteously about the Reaganites' "sleaze factor," have recently been reminded. They shouldn't have forgotten LBJ so quickly, or the unfortunate examples of Sleaze^2 that have injured the political saga of the Kennedy family.

Now that the fascination with the Ferraro/Zaccaro finances has abated, it is time for a little reflection. During the ordeal no one ever suggested any taint of Sleaze^1. Sleaze^2 was suspected in certain corners of Mr. Zaccaro's business dealings. Yet, with the removal of Zaccaro as executor of the estate from which he borrowed, and later repaid with interest, the sum of $175,000, the judge made explicit that Zaccaro had not been convicted of illegality. He was removed to avoid any trace of impropriety. Could this be Sleaze^2 even though Zaccaro himself is not running for office? Exactly what is the nature of the marital relationship in a sleaze-hunt? Can a spouse disqualify one, or is that "sleaze by association"?

Meanwhile, the disclosure process has cost the Zaccaros plenty: $50,000 for accountants and lawyers, the loss of Zaccaro's expected payment as conservator, and back federal taxes plus interest — only discovered when the latest accountant found a previous accountant's error. Furthermore, reports indicate that all the publicity has had a deleterious effect on Zaccaro's real estate business.

Not surprisingly, the objection now being raised in business circles is that many good people are being deterred from government service because they will refuse to bear such scrutiny. Anyone who has ever "stretched" a bit on a tax form feels some identification with that concern.

But still. . . . Maybe we should be more worried about what seem to be the normal ethical levels of business practice in large parts of the economy. In any case, brushing the whole thing aside in a fit either of misplaced largesse or resigned worldliness doesn't help.

The Ferraro case is particularly instructive. After two weeks of media coverage, enough to rival any soap opera for intensity and complexity of plot, Geraldine Ferraro's responses during a ninety-minute press conference left the public wondering whether its suspicions of sleaze had been over-aroused.

A *New York Times* editorial boiled down the controversies: 1) whether Ferraro should have claimed an exemption from disclosure for her husband; 2) whether the financing for her 1978 campaign was proper; and 3) whether the family paid its fair share of federal taxes. The *Times* concluded: "Nothing now known casts any doubt whatever on Mrs. Ferraro's capacity to serve the nation as Vice-President." This conclusion is based on judgments regarding Ferraro's personal intentions and the intent of the law. It recognizes the difference between a mistake and a willful evasion. This is one possible conclusion.

What seems grimly certain is that the process of joint disclosure by professional couples will become commonplace, and we will see more of this complex haggling in the future. The way the candidate responds will determine whether clearing such a preliminary hurdle successfully qualifies her/him for high public office.

What remains to be seen, and what the moment-by-moment poll-taking fails to measure, is whether the mere suspicion of sleaze is so sticky that it cannot be removed from the public memory regardless of a positive disclosure. Even in private life, it is difficult to recover from suspicion. Reputations take years to build and minutes to ruin. In public life it is at least as difficult to recover, and any newcomer is at a disadvantage.

Of course, the aim of vigilance concerning sleaze is to undergird public trust. With the fall campaign beginning to reach full tilt, Democrats must do all they can to assure the nation of their moral authority, their leadership, and the strength of their political positions: the "trust factor" must be their first order of business if they hope to compete with the popular image of President Reagan as a moral leader. No doubt, the "trust factor," like the "sleaze factor," involves a lot of imponderables — matters of character and judgment and sensitivity which are communicated by a candidate (or, alas, by a slick advertising campaign). But the "trust factor" should also rest on what a ticket's policy proposals reveal of solidity, consistency, and vision. Public scrutiny, in short, should extend to tax returns, but it had better not stop there.

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SEEKERS AFTER JUSTICE

● "Ah, what a good life, and what a fine death!" wrote Angelo Roncalli at the death of his younger brother in 1957. The same must be said at the death of Msgr. Geno Baroni, 53, who died in Washington, D.C. last month after a long struggle with peritoneal mesothelioma cancer. He was rightly known as one of the most effective and innovative Catholic social actionists of this generation, and we shall miss him.

Born of an immigrant coal-mining family in Acosta, Pa., Baroni brought the stamina of the laborer to all he did, and a relish for ethnic variation. He recalled that in high school, "When I took my salami sandwiches to school, the teacher fussed about the smell."

He was ordained in 1956, and soon stationed in a Johnstown, Pa., steel-mill parish where "the pastor spoke for the company, and I spoke for the union." When wealthy parishioners chided him for his outspokenness, warning such forwardness would limit his ecclesiastical rise, Fr. Baroni wryly responded: "Me, a bishop? I'm just an Italian kid lucky to be ordained at all." In Johnstown he initiated a credit union ("Man does not live by bread alone, but by credit as well") that today includes 7,000 members.

In the 1960s Baroni became the pastor of a racially diverse parish in Washington, D.C. Such diversity was salt to him, and his naturally cheerful spirit combined with a tactical gift for building concordances. "I am interested in legitimizing pluralism," he said. So he marched with Martin Luther King, Jr., founded the Campaign for Human Development, established neighborhood development groups in over forty-five cities, and served as undersecretary of the Department of Housing and Urban Development. Rep. Marcy Kaptur of Ohio recently recalled that at a meeting of community leaders from around the country she discovered "that the thing we all had in common was that we became involved in public life because of Geno."

This involvement was presumed by Baroni. But not simply an activist or social mover, his concern was genuinely pastoral, for the life of parishes and his fellow workers. He was concerned for their sense of rootedness and continuity. "I think that the sense of identity and heritage is very important to the life of the church," he told the *Notre Dame Journal of Education* in 1973. "Many of our priests and nuns are . . . moving away from their heritage, their culture, and their traditions. They are giving up identity with those values and goals traditional to the church, and consequently are causing a crisis within themselves."

His own last illness, after repeated bouts with cancer, was the mark of his own mettle. Weekly, for over two years, he met with other cancer patients at the Washington School of Psychiatry for attitude therapy sessions. "You can panic, be fearful, wary, and distressed, or you can go on. You can say, 'I have to learn how to live,' and not let something die within you while you're supposed to be waiting for the end." He called these sessions "the best medicine I've got." He conducted healing services at his old parish, and told friends, "There's a great tension between the will to live and the will to die. You've got to have both."

We have now had both — his life and his death. As Pope John XXIII would have put it, "Ah, what a good life, and what a fine death!"

● Ann Harrigan Makletzoff died of cancer in Toronto last June 23. A volunteer in the interracial apostolate of Baronness de Hueck's Harlem Friendship House, in 1942 she went to Chicago at the invitation of Bishop Bernard Sheil to become one of the founders of a Friendship House there. Her friend Nina Polcyn Moore recently wrote to us about her, "She was a white woman committed to change the face of the earth from that little beginning place in a black neighborhood. Friendship House had no chart or formula, recipe or manual. There was a boldness in this approach. . . . Ordinary white people met ordinary black people and became friends."

Ann Harrigan Makletzoff reflected on her Friendship House experience six years ago in *Commonweal* ("Living a Revolution," Dec. 5, 1978). In recent times, she was encouraged by friends to complete an account of her work; they are hoping to have it published soon. She was survived by three children; but, adds Nina Polcyn Moore, "her survivors are all who were moved by her example, her eloquence, and her overflowing dedication to the precept: 'Love one another.' "

Abortion debate

RULES FOR LIBERALS

MAKING THEIR VOICES HEARD

THE VICE PRESIDENTIAL candidacy of Geraldine Ferraro — who is simultaneously a Roman Catholic, a liberal Democrat, and the defender of a pro-choice position on abortion — has assured that the abortion issue will remain front and center throughout the election season. The two really loud voices in the political debate on abortion are of course the conservative pro-life camp (captained by Ronald Reagan) and the liberal pro-choice camp (led by virtually the entire top leadership of the national Democratic Party). Lost in the din of these voices is the wee quiet voice of the liberal anti-abortion camp. But given the degree of current attention to the abortion question, there exists the chance — a slim chance, no doubt, but still a chance — that some notice will be given to this third, apparently eccentric, position. What follows are some suggested rules for liberal anti-abortionists should they join the current debate.

● *Maintain a generalized pro-life context.* The anti-abortion liberal must maintain that opposition to abortion is not an isolated pro-life position. Rather it is part and parcel of an opposition to all those forces which either eliminate, threaten

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or diminish human life — the arms race, war, capital punishment, poverty, ignorance, disease, cultural deprivation, racism, sexism, etc.

● *Underline the faith/reason distinction.* Though an elementary blunder, there exists the widespread belief that the wrongness of abortion is not supposed to be a rule discoverable by moral reason but is rather a kind of in-house morality peculiar to religious communities, e.g., Catholics, Southern Baptists, Orthodox Jews — akin to the Moslem prohibition on eating pork. Once this is assumed, it seems plainly absurd for Catholics and others to attempt to "impose" the special rules of their faith on the public at large; in this vein Geraldine Ferraro's defense of her pro-choice position — a defense that would be merely silly if the morality of abortion is something that can be decided by moral reason — makes perfectly good sense: While she personally, as a result of her religious beliefs, disapproves of abortion, she doesn't feel entitled to force those beliefs on others.

In face of such an assumption the anti-abortion liberal must never tire of repeating what seems so obvious: that as a citizen objection to abortion is based on reason, not on faith or church discipline.

● *Remember that abortion on demand is the real political issue.* Once it is granted that abortion ought to be debated as a matter of common moral reason, not as a matter of supernatural revelation, it follows that the real political issue is not whether abortion should be allowed in "hard cases" (rape, incest, the life and safety of the mother, etc.) but whether it should be allowed "on demand" — that is, for any reason, no matter how trivial, and at any time, no matter how late in the pregnancy.

I concede that this does not logically follow, but it does follow for all practical purposes. It is contended with a good deal of plausibility that the personhood of the fetus from the moment of conception is a reality accessible to reason, not a pure datum of faith. After all, what moment is more likely to mark the inception of personhood? The leap from non-personhood to personhood is so vast, metaphysically speaking, that it must be marked by some correspondingly dramatic leap in the physical order. But gradualism is the mark of every moment of embryonic development except the first, the moment of conception. It is at this moment that our genetic identity is fixed, that our histories begin. What more probable moment, then, for the commencement of personhood?

So a good rational case can be made that a human person is present from the moment of conception; this is a discussion the morally and philosophically sensitive citizen will want to continue. But this is also a case which in 1984 and for the indefinite future will surely be more successful in a philosophical seminar than in the political arena. Just as it is out of bounds to justify public policies with arguments drawn from revelation, so it is out of bounds to justify them with rational arguments that are so abstruse or so problematical that they cannot hope to command even the grudging assent of public opinion. Precisely where the shifting boundary line lies at the moment between acceptable and unacceptable rational justifications I am not sure. But at present and for the remotely foreseeable future, at least in the United States, the argument that personhood begins at conception plainly will not do as a premise for public policy. Consider for a moment to what policies such a premise would commit the public. It would have to prohibit not simply abortion on demand but abortion in all cases, even the hardest of the hard cases. It would have to forbid all birth control devices which function not by preventing conception but by preventing the fertilized ovum from implanting on the wall of the uterus. Nor is that all: how do adherents of full-personhood-at-conception regard the vast number of spontaneous abortions and spontaneous failures of implantation in the uterine wall? Hence the premise from which these hypothetical policies and metaphysical conundrums are derived — namely, that personhood begins at conception — is likewise politically unrealistic, no matter how meritorious it may be from a logical or metaphysical point of view.

Abortion in hard cases, especially when performed early in the pregnancy, we'll just have to live with as best we can. Abortion on demand is the great scandal, the colossal national disgrace — that no society can live with which has not abdicated either its decency or its moral intelligence.

DAVID R. CARLIN, JR.

(David R. Carlin, Jr., is a senator in the Rhode Island state legislature.)

Of several minds: *John Garvey*

'CHRIST AMONG US'

A CLOSER LOOK AT THE CRITICISMS

BY ORDERING the *imprimatur* removed from *Christ Among Us* and declaring that the book could no longer be used as a catechetical introduction for adults, the Vatican raised a number of good questions: Was the decision of Rome to forbid the use of the book primarily the result of lobbying by one conservative group, Catholics United for the Faith? Didn't Rome abuse its authority (or at the very least behave rudely) when it made its decision about the book without consulting any American bishop? Is collegiality dead? Does the fact that the author, Anthony Wilhelm, is a former priest have anything to do with Rome's objections to the book? Is it right for the Vatican to suppress a book without saying what it finds objectionable in it, as was done with *Christ Among Us*?

These questions are good ones, but there are other important questions which

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have been overlooked in the excitement. I am prepared to grant that Rome behaved badly towards the book and its publisher, Paulist Press. Church politics interest me about as much as cricket does, and I leave the sorting out of all these things to people who care about them. What I do want to look at is the source of the controversy itself — the book and the charges brought against it by the conservative critics who have been unhappy with the fact that it is America's most widely used catechism for the instruction of adult converts. Do the conservatives have a case? Is the book unorthodox in its presentation of Catholic Christianity? Perhaps the most important question is this: what criteria should be used to determine orthodoxy?

The case Catholics United for the Faith made against *Christ Among Us* was summed up in a review which appeared in the right-wing Catholic newspaper *The Wanderer* in 1982. The author of the review, CUF Vice President James Likoudis, calls the book a "poisonous fountain of neo-Modernist errors" in the first paragraph, and this is before he has even warmed up. Warming up doesn't take him long, however; Likoudis finds *Christ Among Us* wanting in its treatment of an array of topics which are apparently touchstones of orthodoxy for members of Catholics United for the Faith.

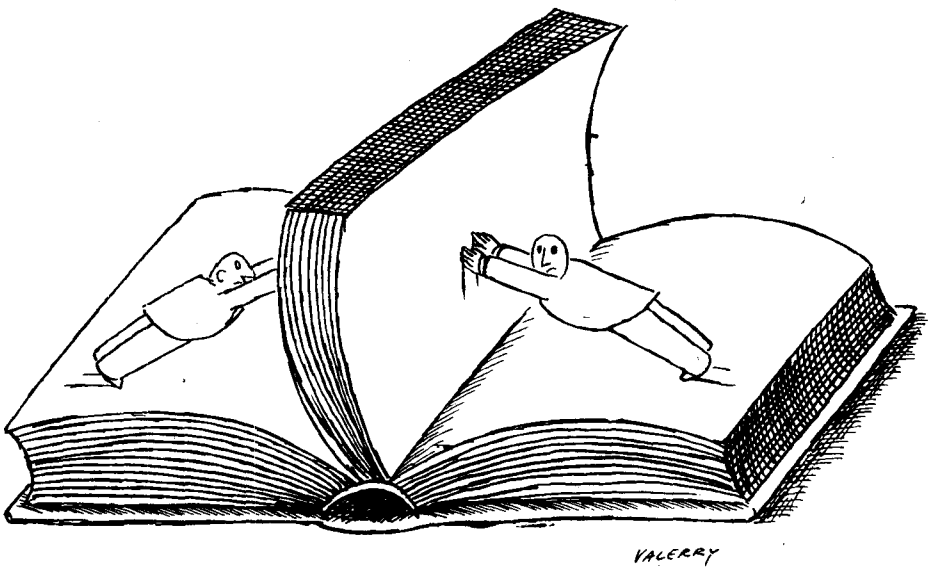
The Likoudis review is interspersed with a number of headings which are probably those of the editor, not Likoudis; nonetheless, they spell out the CUF concerns. DO ANGELS REALLY EXIST? WAS MARY REALLY A VIRGIN? HERETICAL CHRISTOLOGY. ORIGINAL SIN RADICALLY DISTORTED. SANCTIONS CONTRACEPTION. DISTORTS CARDINAL NEWMAN'S VIEWS. RADICAL SUBJECTIFICATION OF GOD'S MORAL LAW. FUNDAMENTAL OPTION ENTRENCHED. TRANSUBSTANTIATION IGNORED AND UNDERMINED. And there is, of course, more.

Some of the questions here are, plainly, objectively more important than others. It matters more if someone's Christology is heretical than if Cardinal Newman's views are distorted. The language of "fundamental option" always seemed to me to be more suited to stock traders than to moral theologians, but the point the defenders of the idea, such as it is, have tried to make is one which should hardly be put in the category of denying the Resurrection or the presence of Christ in the Eucharist. (For those lucky enough to have missed this discussion of "fundamental option," the idea is that the notion of mortal sin should not be attached so much to particular acts as to the basic choice of one's own interests over the will of God, the deliberate orientation towards oneself rather than towards God and neighbor.) The argument in favor of the language of transubstantiation ignores the important questions which theologians, and not only liberal ones, have raised about the way in which this language canonizes an Aristotelian view of matter which has nothing to do with Christian revelation — that is, it assumes the reality of the division between accident and substance. As helpful as that distinction may have been in some arguments, the point which must be made in talking about the Eucharist is surely that the change which occurs is real, and that what the believer receives is truly and completely the presence of Christ. The Eastern churches have never taken up the language of transubstantiation, but Rome has always considered not only their Eucharist valid, but their theology of the Eucharist orthodox.

Catholics United for the Faith accepts everything which comes from Rome uncritically, which puts it to the right of many conservative theologians who are willing to grant that the particular decisions of particular Roman offices really don't carry the same weight as the decisions of ecumenical councils. Throughout history some of the particular decisions of Rome, and for that matter of ecumenical councils, have later been recognized as wrong — I have cited in another context the example of the Council of Florence, which declared with all the solemnity required for infallibility, as defined by the First Vatican Council, the very teaching for which Father Feeney was excommunicated, namely the belief that all who are not in visible communion with the Roman Catholic church (the Orthodox and the Jews were cited specifically) are certainly damned. It was for awhile a Roman teaching that Jews should wear a distinct form of clothing, and this was taken up later by Hitler's advisors. My point is not that Rome is ordinarily so wrong, only that the mere fact that Rome has said something is not a sufficient guarantee of its Christian orthodoxy.

THE POSITION of Catholics United for the Faith is one thing. Are its discomforts with the Wilhelm book entirely misplaced? Is the book in fact unorthodox? And if it is not unorthodox, is it the best catechetical approach to Christian doctrine?

Anthony Wilhelm does present a fair picture of the sorts of things a lot of people studying theology these days are likely to encounter. *Christ Among Us* moves right down the middle of this line of current theological opinion, offering "on the one hand, on the other hand"



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approaches to major issues. This very acknowledgment of ambivalence is no doubt one of the irritants which has exercised the CUF people. It is and has been an element in Catholic theology for years, and existed even before Vatican II, although it existed in an underground way from the time of the Counter Reformation until our own time. CUF would no doubt be as horrified by the medieval debates about the Immaculate Conception (Thomas Aquinas argued against it, with all other good Dominicans; the Franciscans were for it) as they are by some of the current controversies. There has never been an un-messy church.

But there are aspects of the presentation of Catholic faith in *Christ Among Us* which definitely move away from what has ordinarily been called Catholic orthodoxy. To take an issue which has by now bored all of us to tears, *Christ Among Us* treats contraception in a way which no doubt echoes the majority opinion of married couples and even the opinion of many bishops, but not that of Rome. Its presentation does, as the CUF folk charge, make the use of contraception look like a Catholic option — which in fact it is, in practice. But it is one thing to say that Rome teaches one thing about contraception and that many Catholics disagree — a point on which no one would offer much of an argument — and another to say this in a book which is allegedly a presentation of the Catholic faith as defined by Rome. Contraception is only one of the issues here. Another obviously more important one is the divinity of Christ, which CUF sees as diminished by a growing trend in Catholic theology to see the consciousness of Jesus as something which developed throughout his life, or to see his knowledge as historically limited and culturally conditioned.

This issue is not as easy as I thought when I was a college sophomore. Then the idea that Jesus' human consciousness might be radically different from my own made me believe that, if it were, he could be of no help to me, since our experiences would be radically different, so incongruent that one experience could not really touch, and therefore heal, the other. But the problem with this assumption is that it does not recognize a limitation on our own perception of what it means to be human. What if the humanity of Jesus is of such a depth that our own ideas of humanity are lost in it? The full humanity to which the Incarnation calls us is something which is capable of sharing the divinity of Christ. It seems both unimaginative and irreverent to assume that we know the fullness of what it means to be human. It also seems to me to go against the facts of our own experience: I have met some people whose profound goodness and wisdom made me redefine what I thought was humanly possible. I am afraid that there are meetings which go the other way, and reveal depths of evil and self-deception which force a redefinition at another end of the spectrum. In any case, the objection of CUF is that Wilhelm is able to say, "Perhaps as we know that we are fully spiritual beings, that we have a soul, but cannot fully conceive of or reflect on this aspect of ourselves, and as we only gradually come to realize through the experience of living what it means to be a human person — so Jesus only gradually became reflexively conscious of his divine personality, gradually came to know himself more and more deeply."

It is important, I think, that Wilhelm prefaces this with "perhaps," and also that he precedes it with a paragraph which is either uninteresting to, or deliberately ignored by, his critics. That is a paragraph which begins by saying. "Then too, there is a sense in which Jesus developed in the knowledge of himself and his mission. He 'increased in wisdom, and in stature and in favor with God and man.' (Luke 2: 52). What he always was and what he basically knew in the depths of his consciousness, that he was divine, he only gradually came to grasp in the context of his life situation. This is an extraordinarily difficult thing for us who are only human to understand — and ultimately it is a mystery — how a human intellect could grasp the fact that one is a divine person."

This is typical of Wilhelm's procedure. My argument with the CUF critics is that they do not give enough credit to his qualification and moderation, perhaps because they are incapable of noticing them. But my argument with Wilhelm would be that here and elsewhere he gives too much to the *Zeitgeist*, offering relatively recent interpretations as probable, and it could be argued that this is not really the job of a catechism but appropriate rather in speculative theology. To take Luke's reference to Jesus' increase in wisdom and grace, and to say that "he only gradually came to grasp" what he was "in the context of his life situation" is not only to pour a little more jargon than we need into a complicated question (does it make sense to speak of knowing something "basically, in the depths of consciousness" and at the same time not really knowing it? — this is a weightier question than you could guess from the way Wilhelm hurries by it); it is also to assume the correctness of a recent theological opinion. It is not as unorthodox an opinion as Wilhelm's critics suppose. The question of Jesus' self-consciousness has never been made a matter of dogmatic definition. The important thing, obviously, is to assert the mystery: he was fully divine, and fully human, and calls us to share in that life. What it seemed like to Jesus is absolutely beyond our knowing.

In his tentativeness, Wilhelm is more respectful of mystery than his critics are, but the wisdom of advancing a particular and even partisan theology in a catechetical context can be questioned. In the case of his view of contraception and other traditional Catholic teachings regarding sexuality, including premarital sex, Wilhelm does indeed present the consensus of a number of respectable theologians, and he does indeed depart from what has been presented over the years as Catholic teaching. That is, he is not inclined to take the dire approach which regarded most activity in this area as automatically mortally sinful; he presents the traditional teaching, and immediately after points to possible exceptions to a strict reading of that teaching.

What should an adult catechism be like? Can it never be ambivalent? How should it regard tradition and orthodoxy? I would like to explore those questions further in another column.

JOHN GARVEY

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The end of Catholicism?

The discussion continues—responses from readers and Thomas Sheehan

IN ITS August 10 issue, *Commonweal* carried responses by David Tracy and Andrew M. Greeley to an essay that had appeared last June 14 in the *New York Review of Books*. That earlier essay, by Thomas Sheehan, had argued that a "liberal consensus" in Catholic theology had effectively dismantled traditional Catholic beliefs and was "bringing the church to what can be called the end of Catholicism." In their responses, Tracy and Greeley challenged both Sheehan's description of the "liberal consensus" and the conclusions to which Sheehan thought it led. An extraordinary number of readers have now joined this discussion. We print a selection of their comments below, as well as a reply by Thomas Sheehan. A future issue will carry further responses from David Tracy and Andrew M. Greeley. THE EDITORS

A pattern of argumentation

I LIMIT MY response to Thomas Sheehan's article to a single point, namely, to examine *the pattern of argumentation* which leads him to state that the conclusions of the "liberal consensus" effect the dismantling of traditional Roman Catholic theology.

To establish this thesis Sheehan would have to show (1) that the conclusions of the "liberal consensus" contradict elements of traditional Roman Catholic theology and (2) that these elements are essential. Sheehan establishes the first point; he neglects the second.

His basic technique is to list a number of conclusions of the "liberal consensus" which, taken in isolation, sound destructive of traditional Catholic theology. But he fails to indicate that there are positive discoveries of this same consensus which reestablish on a different basis the essentials of the faith.

For example, Sheehan states that according to the "liberal consensus" it seems that Jesus "ordained no priests and consecrated no bishops, indeed he did not know he was supposed to establish the Holy Roman Catholic and Apostolic church with St. Peter as the first in a long line of infallible popes." After allowing for the fact that these assertions are made in an unnuanced way that would make the average scholar wince, one can concede that Sheehan is correct in attributing to the "liberal consensus" these disagreements with traditional Roman Catholic theology.

However, he fails to show that these elements of disagreement are essential to the faith. In fact, a good case can be made that they are not. What is essential to the faith is that (1) Christ established the church and (2) he now constitutes its enduring foundation. Most "liberal consensus" theologians known to me hold these two points. What they disagree with is *the manner* in which traditional Roman Catholic theology accounted for these points.

For in accord with the biblical evidence one may hold that, by his activity with his followers, Jesus set in motion the movement that developed into the structured church. One can trace through the New Testament period a gradual development of the contours of the church from the free-wheeling community of First Corinthians to the more structured later church of the Pastoral Epistles.

Moreover, one may hold that by his resurrection Christ attained the condition which constitutes him as the enduring foundation of the church; for as risen he animates the church, gives it life and growth, makes fruitful its sacraments, and enables it to maintain its basic identity while undergoing adaptations to different times and places.

It seems to me that Sheehan's treatment of the foundation of the church exemplifies the faulty pattern of argumentation that he uses throughout his article: (1) he highlights the differences between traditional Roman Catholic theology and the "liberal consensus"; (2) he omits further aspects of that consensus which preserve the essentials of the faith in a new context; (3) he concludes that the "liberal consensus" makes shipwreck of the traditional theology.

I believe that the "liberal consensus" needs criticism to keep it honest. But the criticism must contain a rounded presentation of the views criticized.

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Tracy but not Greeley

I FEEL THAT David Tracy has said all I should want to say. I don't think the Andrew Greeley piece will do as a criticism of Sheehan. I don't think "we . . . know by naming" or that "we understand by imposing meaning on the conflicting phenomena of our existence." Such statements seem to me wonderful and grotesque examples of philosophical confusion. I prescribe Fergus Kerr's "The Need for Philosophy in Theology Today" (*New Blackfriars* June 1984) as the beginning of a cure.

It is a pity Küng has been given so much attention. He is the weakest of the exemplary group of liberals instanced and *Eternal Life*? is the weakest of his books.

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A challenge, not a threat

THERE ARE THREE things that should be kept in mind in thinking about the issues raised in the essays by Sheehan, Tracy, and Greeley.

1. Sheehan's "liberal consensus" is *his* liberal consensus. David Tracy has already demurred; I suspect that most of the others would (or will if the occasion arises) also. It would be easy to point out the places where Sheehan dogmatically leaps beyond his data, even where he cites the latter.

For example, while quoting Raymond Brown in a footnote that "the scientifically controllable evidence" of scriptural investigation leaves the question of the virginal conception unresolved, Sheehan in his text says, "Most likely Mary told Jesus what she herself knew of his origins: that he had a natural father. . . ."

Similar disparities can easily be shown for Sheehan's "consensus" on the empty tomb, immortality, etc. There is just no such consensus expressible in such bold and bald statements.

2. His essay invokes, with apparent innocence, a number of concepts which are, to say the least, philosophically marked "handle-with-care." Andrew Greeley noted the use of words like "scientific" and "proof." When these terms are used as status-conferring, as honorific rather than as proffered descriptions, the same caution aroused by used-car salesmen should be awakened. What can it mean to speak of the absence of any "proofs" such as an empty tomb? What kind of "proof" is it reasonable to require to validate claims in history, in science, in theology?

There are allusions to the "scientific exegesis" of the Scriptures. There are also many extraordinary statements about what Jesus knew or didn't know about himself, about the "Trinity," etc. Are these scientific conclusions? Is it really not possible to maintain that Jesus could have both a divine and a human understanding? Has that been settled by some philosophical or "scientific" conclusions?

3. The manner as well as the matter of Sheehan's essay raises questions. Why use phrases like "Jesus' alleged resurrection," "Jesus knew nothing about the Trinity"? *Pour épater les bourgeois*? Sheehan's formulations seem intended to be shocking. Yet they are at some distance from the language of many in this "liberal consensus," whose more cautious expressions do not so much reflect pastoral sensitivity as scholarly perception of the error of over-simplification. Was he expressing obliquely his own disbelief? Then why speak of the consequences of all this as "immensely promising" for the Catholic church? Unless "the end of Catholicism" is what is promising.

Sheehan may be right that the shift of concern among theologians and bishops toward social and political issues is only the counterpart of a withdrawal from the crumbling of "traditional theology." Too bad, if so, because the assimilation of the implications of scriptural research for the understanding of doctrine is an occasion for intellectually exciting renewal, a challenge rather than a threat.

FREDERICK J. CROSSON
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Is there a 'liberal trajectory'?

IN ONE RESPECT I would be harsher in my assessment of Sheehan's piece than either of the respondents. His attempt to build a case for a supposed "liberal consensus" in Catholic theology actually misrepresents the views of some of those invoked in support of his thesis.

And yet . . . if Sheehan cannot make a case for a "liberal consensus," does he at least insinuate the reality of a "liberal trajectory" which could indeed eventuate in "the end of Catholicism"? I am persuaded that this is the more pressing issue and the one which, perhaps, inspired *Commonweal* to devote its attention to Sheehan's article. In limiting their attention to methodological and epistemological matters (as was their prerogative), Tracy and Greeley may have avoided the less tractable but ultimately decisive ecclesial question. In this regard I offer three brief observations.

First, there is certainly historical cause for concern. The development of Protestant liberalism, despite its genius and undoubted achievements, often resulted in a reduction of Christian vision to morality within an almost exclusively this-worldly horizon. Are there safeguards in Catholicism against the repetition of this scenario — the scenario to which Sheehan himself seems committed? Are these safeguards sufficiently clarified and respected by Catholic theologians?

Second, while "liberal" theologians dispute methodology and deprecate "Denzinger-theology," non-theologians draw their own conclusions from the seeming absence of conclusions. Increasingly, these conclusions approximate Sheehan's

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own. It would be an irony worthy of Kierkegaard were theologians to succeed in showing the illegitimacy of Sheehan's theoretical construct concerning a "liberal consensus," only to discover that it had for all practical purposes prevailed among the rank and file of "communal Catholics," whose vague "sense" of community and sacramentality will surely wither without theological and institutional support and challenge.

Third, we may well have exhausted the usefulness of epithets like "liberal" and "conservative" in matters religious. In the present situation they tend to obfuscate rather than illuminate issues and options. Moreover, they prevent our mustering adequate and comprehensive resources for the task at hand. Thus to appeal to Newman as a "liberal" would appear strange to one for whom "liberalism" represented just that denial of determinate truth and authority in religion which Newman deprecated.

If it succeeds in alerting Catholics to some of the real perils we, as a community, confront, Thomas Sheehan's tendentious article may actually promote a more self-conscious ecclesial responsibility on the part of us all. Paradoxically, I find myself more comfortable with his straightforward demarcation of alternatives than with David Tracy's well-meaning but rather promiscuous vision of a great "catholic" synthesis presided over by Geraldine Ferraro and Thomas Sheehan. Neither Walter Mondale nor I would be greatly amused.

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Our trust in tradition

OF THE TWO replies to Thomas Sheehan it is that by David Tracy to which I relate most readily. With Tracy I unhesitatingly affirm the "fundamental trust in tradition" which he identifies as an essential element of Catholicism. What, at bottom, has led to Hans Küng's difficulties with church authority (apart from the technical arguments over infallibility, christology, and ministerial priesthood) is Küng's frequent refusal to trust the tradition until it has proved itself to his satisfaction. More than one critic who (on Sheehan's accounting) belongs to the "liberal consensus" in Catholic theology has faulted Küng for a kind of Catholic *sola scriptura*: making a quantum leap from the New Testament to the dialogue with contemporary Protestantism in its German academic guise.

I also accept Tracy's contention that "what is new in modern Catholic theology is a greater recognition that the tradition which is fundamentally trusted . . . is . . . ambiguous and thereby in constant need of correction and self-reform." This "fundamental trust" is crucial. Where this is present, we are on Catholic ground. Where the tradition must first prove itself worthy of trust, we have left the realm of historical Catholicism.

As an example of this fundamental trust in tradition I offer my still vivid recollection of the lectures on the tractate *de Ecclesia* that I heard at the University of Münster nineteen years ago by a man whose name has already figured in this controversy: Joseph Ratzinger. Like the householder bringing out of his storehouse "things new and old" (Matt. 13:52), Ratzinger ranged widely over our two-thousand-year-old tradition, including Scripture, to fashion his doctrine of the church.

Ratzinger never used tradition uncritically, however. He did not treat Scripture in the manner of the neo-scholastic manuals: as a quarry of loose stones in which one could find proof-texts. And he subjected the statements of Fathers, councils, and popes to a rigorous criticism that showed them to be conditioned by time, circumstance, and language. But underlying all was deep respect for the tradition. However limited, however faulty in its individual expressions, however time-conditioned and hence in need of restatement for our times, tradition held the field until there was proof that one of its elements was inconsistent with the whole, and must be jettisoned.

This fundamental trust in the tradition is utterly lacking in champions of frantic orthodoxy such as Msgr. George Kelly and *The Wanderer*. Their knowledge of tradition seldom antedates Vatican I. Such elements of the tradition as they do know they treat with a magisterial fundamentalism that is almost the mirror image of Protestant biblical fundamentalism (itself an American invention, not yet a century old). By a supreme irony it is these zealous defenders of the faith who are today's true modernists, clinging with the desperation of drowning men to a tradition that is very recent.

With other members of Sheehan's "liberal consensus," I find this fundamental trust in tradition sufficiently conditioned in the writings of Hans Küng to justify the judgment of church authority in December 1979 that he "can no longer be considered a Catholic theologian." This judgment must be read, however, in conjunction with the statement of the German bishops on January 7, 1980: it was only "specific points" in Küng's theology, not the whole, that had been repudiated. The bishops also recognized the "pastoral concern" evident in Küng's writings and acknowledged that he had effectively commended Catholic faith to many earnest seekers after truth, though at the price of sowing confusion among many believers.

"The dismantling of traditional Roman Catholic theology," Sheehan affirms in the opening sentence of his article, "is now a *fait accompli*." If church history is any guide, it is certain that in time Catholic theology will emerge reconstituted and renewed. The "liberal consensus" may contribute to this renewal, but can hardly be its basis. For that we must look to what Cardinal Suenens calls "the extreme center." In doing so the rebuilders of Catholic theology will surely rediscover what one of his biographers has called the "innovative traditionalism" of Pope John XXIII.

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Rahner & world church

IN HIS REVIEW Thomas Sheehan signals his ambivalence about the losses and gains for the church that are the result of its recent theology. The losses include a sense of certainty, of absolute authority, and a certain literalism in the understanding of Scripture and church dogma. The gains are an important intellectual creativity and a deeper understanding of the Christian religious story, thoughtfully elaborated by David Tracy and Andrew Greeley. In developing his analysis, Sheehan also makes a disjunction between the pre-revolutionary "folk religion" of "most practicing Catholics" and the beliefs of Catholic exegetes and theologians who have already dismantled traditional Roman Catholic theology. My own sense of "most practicing Catholics" is that they are far more religiously and theologically knowledgeable than Sheehan judges. My sense is that many Catholics, at least, have absorbed not a dismantling so much as a genuine *theological* renewal of understanding since Vatican Council II, a renewal that is based on very traditional sources.

I was surprised to find that, in his list of exegetes and theologians, Sheehan did not mention the single thinker who was and is probably the most influential of the Vatican II era: Karl Rahner. It is Rahner who is studied in Catholic seminaries, colleges, and universities as a kind of contemporary Aquinas. He has written with insight and profundity on almost every important theological topic. His overarching theological vision has "trickled down" in distinctive personal and collective ways to the average pulpit and pew. And Rahner's vision of the self-communication of God to the depths of the individual and to the very structures of the world of human experience — a "world of grace" — was formulated not on the basis of the Bible and new exegesis but on a retrieval of central themes in the Greek Fathers and especially Thomas Aquinas. These themes — of grace as God's personal self-communication, of the unthematic but conscious revelation of God in human historical and worldly experience — have provided a broad theological context in which the developing results of critical biblical exegesis are interpreted in the church today.

Rahner's theological vision of the wholeness of the life of grace in which death makes definitive the (often anonymous) yes or no to God which is freely chosen and expressed in the life of the human person in time, and his firm insistence on resurrection as the irrevocable gift and response of God to all of humankind in Christ, represent a powerful impulse in the pluralism of Catholic theology at present. His method of retrieval of traditional themes in the light of contemporary questions, including questions arising from current exegesis, is quite different from Hans Küng's more biblical approach. This pluralism suggests that Sheehan's "liberal consensus" is far from uniform, even in method and presuppositions. The wide variety of contemporary interpretations within Christianity and within Catholicism further suggests that Sheehan is right in speaking of "the most vigorous intellectual renaissance since the high Middle Ages." What is different about this renaissance is the changed context in which it occurs, a context which Rahner named as the central significance of Vatican II: the emergence, for the first time in history, of a world church. It seems altogether fitting that in a world horizon, an ecumenical context, there appears to be less difference between Protestant and Catholic thought, as Christian theology as a whole encounters the religious stories and theological claims of the other world religions: Judaism and Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism. Christianity's historic doctrinal quarrels over Scripture and tradition, grace and works, are indeed transcended in the framework of a world church and a collaborative ecumenical theology.

This is not to say that there is nothing distinctive about the Catholic tradition within Christianity. It is quite distinctive, as is the American Catholic tradition, and the Calvinist, the Lutheran, the Episcopal, and the Methodist. But, as Rahner suggested, these distinctive traditions possess in their very plurality an already given unity-in-difference that becomes especially apparent in the context of a world church faced with new questions. Central among those questions are the function of the church and the task of Christians in a world of massive oppression, dehumanization, poverty, hunger, and exploitation, a world threatened by nuclear and ecological disaster. That the church, following the direction set by *Gaudium et Spes*, is in its better moments less concerned with its own distinctive identity and more concerned with what it does in a politically torn world, strikes many Catholics, both in the theological community and in the pew, as appropriate.

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Divinity School
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Biblical history rediscovered

I READ WITH interest the replies of David Tracy and Andrew Greeley to Thomas Sheehan's article. Although I often find Sheehan provocative and helpful, his review of Küng proved disappointing. The list of exegetes marshaled into a single category combines people who are not united by any "liberal consensus" but rather by a conviction that the historical evolution of ideas is an essential element in the process by which God reveals truth and salvation to and through the church. The rediscovery of biblical history, indeed of the history of the unfolding of faith within the context of Scripture itself, is one of the primary contributions of the past forty years of Catholic exegesis. These insights may result in the restatement of commonly held Catholic doctrines in more nuanced and existential terms. The sweeping generalizations of Sheehan, neither nuanced accurately nor contextualized critically, were unfairly projected into classrooms of universities and seminaries. Neither exegesis nor Catholic education

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seems well served by such a broadside.

MOST REV. RICHARD J. SKLBA
Auxiliary Bishop of Milwaukee

'I come back to faith'

THIS LETTER is not strictly relevant to your discussion "The End of Catholicism: Is liberal theology undermining the faith?" My reaction is from the point of view of an Episcopalian. I do want to say that Thomas Sheehan's article got to me deeply — not as a theologian, of course, just as a person. I have great feelings of sympathy for his feelings.

To explain, let me go back twenty years and more to the time when I was social studies and religion editor for an encyclopedia. The owners ranked religion at the bottom of the scale of what anyone would want to read about. Nevertheless, the editors managed to sign up some very interesting writers in various creeds and denominations. One of them was an elderly and distinguished Episcopal priest, writer, editor, and authority on the Bible (he was one of the group that produced the Revised Standard Version). He had lived next door to Paul Tillich and really knew a lot about modern theologians (including Roman Catholics). One day at a meeting an editor said: "Come on now, Dr. F., you don't really believe all that stuff, do you?" (meaning the Incarnation and Resurrection and a lot in between). Dr. F. replied that he of course did not take the Bible literally; as we should have noticed he had spent a lot of his life in critical study of the Bible; but he could still say the Creed with belief.

A year or two later Dr. F.'s wife died and my second wife died. We met as often as we could to keep busy and possibly to help each other. One day Dr. F. said to me: "Do you know . . . not so many years ago I would have said to you with total faith that our wives are now in a better world than we can know, so that our grieving has to be for us and not at all for them. But the modern theologians I have read so long leave me without that faith."

This was hard for him to say and for me to hear, and I cannot forget it. Of course, we did not have to heed the theologians, we could have marched on strong in our faith. But we did not, and I have some feelings of discomfort about the theologians. They took away — or caused us to let go of — some deep and old beliefs.

I should now add that a great many Episcopalians, including the one who questioned Dr. F. would ask me why it took me to the 1960s to raise basic doubts about doctrine. (It did not; Dr.F. brought the doubts into focus.) For many Episcopalians the essence of Christianity is not the divinity of Christ or the promise of life after death — it is a social and ethical message that might some day be as respectable as Buddhism or Confucianism — if we can get rid of the mumbo-jumbo.

As I see it, the basic question in a debate with Thomas Sheehan is not what we can learn from reason and argument. The basic point is, Do we have faith in the Incarnation and Resurrection? I do not mean to side with the fundamentalists and call the Bible unquestionable. My grandfather was an Episcopal priest and an Old Testament scholar. People tried to bring a charge of heresy against him when he was a pioneer in critical analysis of the Scriptures. But as far as I know his sharp eye on the words of the text never made him doubt the essential message of the Testaments. When he read the funeral service for his wife, I believe that he had no doubts.

So, I would like to ask David Tracy and Andrew M. Greeley: When all is said and done, do you believe? Christianity has to come back to belief. Let me illustrate by a reaction I heard to Hans Küng's book on belief in God. I am not — repeat NOT — commenting on Dr. Küng's book, but on the reaction I heard, which could be summed up in this sentence: "Oh, thanks be to Küng, we can go on believing in God." The speaker wanted to believe. He also felt driven to find what he considered scientifically respectable reasons for belief. He said Dr. Küng had given him those reasons. But in my judgment the man had not settled anything; he had simply shifted the grounds of the debate so that he said "I believe in Küng, therefore I believe in God." I asked him if God had existed before Dr. Küng, but he did not want to worry about his new-found contentment.

It comes back to faith. Do we believe in at least the Incarnation and Resurrection? If not, then I think we have to move on to something other than Catholicism or Episcopalianism.

LORING W. BATTEN, III
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The heart of the disciple

THE "LIBERAL CONSENSUS" is that far less is known of the historical Jesus than the Catholic Christian tradition claims to know. Of course, "the historical Jesus" is only what can be known of Jesus by strictly scientific historical research. To equate this figure with the Jesus who actually lived and breathed, and is part of our present experience, is an injustice to the living past such as we would never do to our great grandparents. The church, in celebrating a living memory of a man who totally transformed human existence, no more expects the context of this memory to be served up by scientific historical research, than anyone with a vibrant sense of his or her ancestry (and of what Eliot calls the presentness of the past) would expect the content of that precious sense to be so served up. It is otherwise that the church knows her Lord. It is otherwise that the poet knows her past.

And it was *originally* otherwise that the disciples knew Jesus than in the way of straight common-sense observation. It was in the way of discipleship. Where wisdom is taught and learned, the teacher opens the heart of the disciple to the reality of spirit, to a sense of people and their life that differs, as chalk from cheese, from common-sense knowing. St. Paul calls it "knowing according to the flesh." In the case of the disciples of Jesus, this opening of the heart had to endure the total

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desolation of his horrible death, and so was brought into the vision of him victorious over death that is the abiding power of Christian faith.

Now while modern biblical criticism has been indispensable to the renewal of our theological understanding, it has a very serious lacuna, pointed out by Donald Evans in his liberating article in *Commonweal* [July 13]: It has no room for spiritual, mystical, discipular knowing, on which Christianity, like the other world religions, is based. This systematic agnosticism about what, for the authors it studies, was passionately known, is a distorting factor that the believer must bear in mind. He or she would also do well to hear the lament of Northrop Frye on the nearly total absence of *literary* criticism of the Bible — the sort of thing the great critics have done to enhance our enjoyment of Shakespeare. The two lacunae are connected, of course.

The invaluable positive contribution of biblical criticism is that it deprives us of a Jesus who gave us our church and our faith *in a quite plain-and-simple way,* told us just who he was and what we were to do about it — no mystery, no scandal of the cross, no challenge. The faith is enriched, not impoverished, by being deprived of such a Jesus. Spirituality can be avoided by the believer as well as the nonbeliever — each in support of his or her position.

Unfortunately there is a grounded lack of trust in church authority today, a feeling that it will continue to sell this authority-supporting image of Christ, if it can get away with it, drawing for support on the current wave of Catholic fundamentalism. I look forward to a Christian maturing in us, whereby we shall take responsibility for our Christian faith, and look on this dishonesty with unsurprised compassion.

SEBASTIAN MOORE
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Life-giving *mythos* about love

WHILE I want to credit Sheehan's outlook fully, he writes like a Catholic to whom too much was "proved" in undergraduate courses by teachers who studied under graduates of the Roman universities. It is doubtful that many Catholic teachers or preachers of the first half of this century were making distinctions in college classes as correctly as Tracy does in his article, between commitment to the Catholic tradition in faith, and certitude about apparent historical details in the gospels. What he does so neatly is now a commonplace, but one that can have escaped many a mid-life Catholic with academic training in some other field.

Professor Sheehan does all thoughtful Catholics a service by surfacing a question which Greeley deals with on other terms: must the "religious story which claims that love stronger than death is what the universe is about" forever be presented from episcopal and papal chairs as if the Enlightenment had not occurred? A papal encyclical letter of 1943, an instruction of the Pontifical Biblical Commission of 1964, a document of the Second Council of the Vatican of 1965, all acknowledge hesitatingly that the Bible is no modern historiography. Would not extended and forthright discussions of the nature of religious *mythos*, revelatory for the believer, be more in order? Why must papal utterances quote the church Fathers appositely on the Bible but fall silent on the critical studies of the last two hundred years?

The answer, I think, is that religion's proper business is the transmission of a life-giving *mythos* about a love stronger than death. The business of the educated (I include pulpit preachers and elementary school teachers) is to learn and convey all they can about the nature of this *mythos* from a modern perspective. It is a scandal when anyone in authority in the church deals with another person as if the *mythos* were historically true in all its details or, worse, through failure to read and study, thinks that such is the case. What is needed is a climate of perfect freedom in the church while the life-giving, love-begetting story is being told and pondered. A variety of trustworthy teachers who know the Catholic tradition and profess it will always be able to trace it from its biblical roots. The Bible is too powerful a *mythos* on its own terms, however, to be reduced to any one theology of it at the level of the whole church.

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Misconstruing the direction

BOTH TRACY and Greeley rightfully point out some significant inadequacies. Since I agree with their responses, I simply want to underscore some further points of disagreements with Sheehan's analysis.

First: his description of the "liberal consensus." His sketch of the consensus misconstrues the direction of the last decades of historical research. Liberalism postulated a dichotomy between the historical Jesus of Palestine and the dogmas of hellenistic Christianity, between the imminent apocalyptic expectation and the emergence of church order. Yet recent research, especially Roman Catholic research, has gone in the opposite direction. It has shown how the early Christian creeds sought to explicate dimensions of the life and praxis of the historical Jesus. Wisdom traditions and hellenistic materials, originally discarded as unhistorical, have been shown to have roots in Palestine. Likewise the recent application of categories from sociology and anthropology, for example, those concerning messianic movements and cognitive dissonance, have shown how apocalyptic expectation and community formation were not exclusive but inclusive. By focusing on the minimal consensus about the consciousness of Jesus and the use of explicit christological titles, Sheehan overlooks what the contemporary consensus endeavors to show as the basis for the move from an implicit to an explicit christology, and from eschatology to ecclesiology. The contemporary consensus reacts on many points to liberalism. It represents a

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Catholic consensus by seeking to draw the lines of continuity and change, identity and development. It does thereby provide the Catholic vision the absence of which Sheehan bemoans.

Second: Sheehan, a Heidegger expert, surprised me with his critique of the Catholic rediscovery of the "Protestant Wheel." Revelation provides the basis of faith; yet faith is necessary to know revelation. No foundation outside of faith and revelation exists for Christian faith. Heidegger's conception of truth has led many theologians to grasp that truth is much more primordial than objective correspondence, and it resists the type of foundationalism that seeks objective scientific foundations.

Rather than the tendentious label "Protestant Wheel," the term "double hermeneutic" more appropriately describes our relation to the early Christian texts. The natural sciences are hermeneutical insofar as the models and the paradigms selected by the researcher influence the formulation of theory. All the humane and cultural sciences, and not just theology, have an additional hermeneutic, for they deal with a subject matter that is preinterpreted and symbolic. To understand texts about the human drama of love, sexuality, music, and tragedy, one needs to stand in some life-relation to love, sexuality, music, and tragedy. Unless one stands in a participatory relation to what texts are about, one cannot understand. Likewise, without a pre-understanding of religious claims, without some religious experience of the transcendent, even at least as a life-question, one is not in a position to understand the claims made by the New Testament that speak of God's grace and revelation in Christ. This double hermeneutic is not an invention of theologians, but is a general hermeneutical principle affecting every attempt to understand the products of human culture.

Third: Sheehan bemoans the loss of foundational proofs. The awareness of the hermeneutical situation does not eliminate but redefines proofs and criteria. In my own work in foundational theology, I have suggested that objective "proofs" have been replaced by a multifaced process of reflective equilibrium. One brings to bear diverse elements. First there is the reconstructive attempt to interpret the tradition, its priorities, and its vision. Then there are warrants drawn from the ability of the tradition to illumine, to confront, and to guide human experience. Finally there are the relevant background theories affecting the presuppositions and application of the tradition. A retrieval of the truth and meaning of the tradition combines such diverse elements. Such a process seeks to develop criteria of justification while acknowledging at the same time that we stand within religious and cultural traditions as well as within contemporary experience and scientific reflectivity. The genius of contemporary liberal Catholic theology lies in the forging together of these diverse factors, enabling it to accept much of historical criticism and yet to forge a vision of Catholic identity that is both historical and ongoing.

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Betting on 'pious agnosticism'

CLEARLY SHEEHAN has touched a nerve. His review claims to find Roman Catholic thought in a condition of "pious agnosticism"; and if the theologians will not use that phrase, Sheehan will. His review discovers what it advocates and advocates what it discovers. Great changes have *already* taken place, it argues.

The style of Sheehan's thought is apocalyptic. He claims that a direction of development is clear from the facts and suggests that we must either join up or be left out — or left behind in those pockets of conservatism of which he speaks. Not surprisingly, Tracy and Greeley argue with him about the facts: they do not see the consensus that he sees in Catholic theology. For this reason and others, they do not find themselves boxed epistemologically into his conclusions.

As refutation, all this is legitimate enough. There is, however, another, better way to take up Sheehan's challenge, one that goes deliberately to his conclusion rather than to his premises. Whether epistemology and the consensus in theology require or preclude it, pious agnosticism is a condition in which a good many Catholics find themselves. For a self-conscious few like Sheehan, it is an option they have deliberately chosen.

How, for example, does pious agnosticism differ from profane agnosticism? How does pious agnosticism relate to skepticism, a philosophical tradition of greater antiquity and burgeoning recent interest? How, if at all, in places like Poland, El Salvador, and Korea, does Catholic social action relate to pious agnosticism? I recently read the unpublished translation of a letter from prison by the heroic Korean dissident Kim Dae Jung. All about the Resurrection, it was anything but agnostic.

I confess I find pious agnosticism simpler and more appealing than David Tracy's Catholic pluralism or Andrew Greeley's mental modeling. Faith and agnosticism have in common a certain grounding suspicion that what we don't know we don't know may make all the difference. But if agnosticism is the path one takes, one should follow it as nearly as possible to the end. When Sheehan says, "As far as one can know, when you're dead, you're dead," does he think the knowledge mentioned to be much or little? If he thinks it much, his agnosticism suffers the same kind of crippling qualification that he finds in the faith of a theologian like Hans

NEXT ISSUE
The end of Catholicism?
CONCLUDING RESPONSES FROM
DAVID TRACY
ANDREW M. GREELEY

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Küng. The chemist Michael Faraday once wrote, "Nothing is too wonderful to be true." Why must resurrection be the exception to this rule? Or does Sheehan know something he isn't telling us?

The scholastic refutation of skepticism claims that any response in argument implies knowledge. Thus, if you tell a skeptic that he does know a thing or two, *aut tacet aut consentit:* either he says nothing or he agrees, because saying anything involves knowledge, which entails agreement. But faith and skepticism may be refuted as logical positions and survive as existential ideals. It is as an ideal that pious agnosticism merits consideration. The moral rather than the logical complications are the ones that intrigue me and ought to intrigue Sheehan as well, given his vision of an orthoprax church.

In her novel, *Wise Blood,* Flannery O'Connor's boy preacher, Hazel Motes, cries; ". . . I preach the Church Without Christ. I'm member and preacher to that church where the blind don't see and the lame don't walk and what's dead stays that way. Ask me about that church and I'll tell you it's the church that the blood of Jesus don't foul with redemption." Motes makes Pascal's wager in reverse, only he does not think it is a wager at all: he *knows* that what's dead stays that way. He *knows* there is no redemption. He is not a pious agnostic, but if you will, an impious gnostic.

Impious gnosticism seems to me to be the principal pitfall of pious agnosticism, and O'Connor's story can be read as a fable about the consequences of passage from the one to the other. Hazel Motes does not rely on himself after his break with Jesus. It is not his determination to lead a good life that holds him together. Not at all: he relies on his car. "Nobody with a good car needs to be Justified," he says, and he means it. When a sadistic highway patrolman runs Motes's car over a cliff, Motes acts as if his life is over. He acts unjustified, lost. He blinds himself, wanders off, and is found face-down in a ditch. When pious agnosticism becomes impious gnosticism, there is the danger that it may become anxious, vulnerable materialism — as if to say, nobody without a good car can be justified. When the only American dream being dreamt is, as it now is, the dream of a level of material comfort that most of the young people in the country will never enjoy, then we should not be surprised that teen-age suicide rates are climbing.

I don't like slippery-slope arguments if only because most positions lie on some kind of slippery slope. Nothing makes the decline from pious agnosticism to impious gnosticism to materialism to suicide inevitable. But if some such decline is possible in a few cases, it is worth worrying about as one selects which gamble to make. We have no choice but a choice of gambles.

Pascal's wager in reverse is the gamble Sheehan proposes. As this seems to be the wager I have made with my own life, so — as among Tracy, Greeley, and Sheehan — I find I have most in common with Sheehan. But at best one makes this kind of wager without knowing what the stakes are. I would welcome a discussion of the stakes.

JACK MILES
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God is not well served by lies

IN 1943 I BEGAN to teach exegesis at a Jesuit seminary. Older readers will notice that *Divino Afflante Spiritu* appeared that same year. For most of the next eighteen years I dealt annually with several versions of the question, "Now it's Adam and Eve, next it will be the Resurrection," repeated with insistence and with varying degrees of discourtesy and answered with monotonous regularity. The seminarians who initiated me, if they survive, have reached or are approaching the fortieth anniversary of their ordination. Dr. Thomas Sheehan has shown that the question has neither disappeared nor changed in substance in forty years. Nor have I improved the answer I gave then: "We will cross that bridge when we come to it. While we are on the way, we have to follow our stars. We have to trust the collective integrity of Catholic scholars. As far as Adam and Eve (or Moses, or the Red Sea, or Mount Sinai, or the Virgin Birth, or miracles) are concerned, you must bear in mind what we will read in Job: God is not well served by telling lies on his behalf."

I did not say in 1944, but I have said more than once since and not in secret, that I would rather trust the integrity of my fellow scholars (not without reservations) than I would trust the integrity of those officials of the Roman Curia who handle thought control. The history of Modernism and of biblical and theological scholarship in the church since 1907 suggests that thought control is not possible without sins against charity, justice, and veracity. Let me borrow a phrase from the late Father Frank Gerst who once said to a Jesuit domestic official, "You are entitled to reprove me, but neither you nor any other S.O.B. can tell me what I think."

Now we have come to the bridge mentioned above. I think my colleagues have shown a charming uncertainty and malaise, befitting those who are not sure where they are or where they are going. Most of them have shown no readiness to renounce theology or their Catholic belief nor any desire to give it all up and turn, as Sheehan seems to suggest, to more important things like raising the quality of life or the standard of living. I think they have learned that theology is not the church but that it ought to serve the church, whose members are legitimately interested in what they are doing. They are sure only that their work is unfinished, and that it must not be halted. We must continue to trust them.

I praise Sheehan for candidly posing the choices as he sees them. As David Tracy has pointed out, Sheehan is not to be lumped with the witch-hunters of the Vatican or *The Wanderer* or Catholics United for the Faith. I do not agree with him, but he is ready to engage in rational debate. I think we (if I may be included in the "liberal consensus") should accept the invitation. Perhaps that will show how liberal we really are.

As I see it, I propose with all due modesty that we ought to avoid the danger of turning salvation into a fairer distribution of wealth or implying that the Reign of God will be achieved

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when all of mankind and womankind will have made it to the middle class. I am not sure what salvation or the Reign of God is but I know it is not that. We ought to avoid the implication that salvation demands the achievement of the full potentiality for wealth and the exploitation of nature which seems to lie within the grasp of contemporary Western civilization. Secondly, we should avoid trivializing Jesus. We trivialize him when we say that he is too naive for our sophisticated world, or that his simple village wisdom cannot speak to our complex world and the complex mess we have made of it. We trivialize Jesus when we say that without the understanding made possible by modern theology (nothing personal intended for David Tracy) or modern sociological analysis (nothing personal intended for Andrew Greeley) or modern historical and critical analysis (perhaps something personal intended for me) the New Testament, written without these things, says nothing meaningful to the moral and social problems of contemporary men and women.

JOHN L. McKENZIE
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A RESPONSE TO DAVID TRACY

On Satan & Catholic liberals

THOMAS SHEEHAN

"Only the devil in person can now save the Catholic church, and you ask for angels."
—Cardinal Pierre d'Ailly,
cited by Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte.*

WHEN Cardinal d'Ailly spoke those words at the Council of Constance in 1420, the church to which he was referring was reeling from the Avignon papacy and the Western Schism and was hurtling downhill towards the Protestant Reformation. In the interest of rescuing that church, the cardinal was beseeching the assembled fathers not to be too harsh on certain members of the hierarchy who, despite their unsavory morals, just might be able to see the Bark of Peter through the rough seas ahead.

Today, at the dawn of her third millennium, the Catholic church, like the rest of Christianity, is facing a much deeper crisis, one in fact that cuts to the very foundations of what she is. And perhaps the point is not to salvage Catholicism or Christianity but to let go of them so that one can discover what they were supposed to be about. In any case, Cardinal d'Ailly's words, adapted to the new situation, can have an even greater meaning for us today than they did for the Council Fathers five-and-a-half centuries ago.

The foundational crisis in contemporary Catholicism is neither reducible to nor the sum total of such surface conflicts and problems as the dramatic decline in religious vocations and church attendance in the developed countries, or the open defiance of Vatican pronouncements on certain moral questions, or the near revolt of women against Pope Wotyla's refusal to let them assume a greater role in the church. These and other such problems are, of course, important in themselves, but at best they are only surface tremors, symptoms of something that lies deeper. They are like the eerie moans and murmurs that windowpanes in San Francisco make during those frozen few seconds before an earthquake rips upward from the depths.

Today the church is facing a crisis at the level of the foundations, not the surface, a crisis in fundamental theory rather than day-to-day practice. Her crisis is comparable to a similar one in contemporary Marxism. For some time now the leading intellectuals in both camps have been raising serious questions about the most fundamental ideological tenets of their respective traditions — whether those be surplus value or the dictatorship of the proletariat on the one hand (cf. the French Communist Party's 22nd Congress in 1976) or the Resurrection and divinity of Jesus on the other. And no matter how much these Marxist and Christian "liberals" proclaim their loyalty to their respective traditions, both Moscow and the Vatican seem intent on condemning these efforts as a new and very dangerous *trahison des clercs*.

In the case of Marxism it is as though Communist intellectuals were finally beginning to pay attention to Karl Marx's disclaimer before the First International: *"Moi, je ne suis pas marxiste!"* And in the case of Catholicism it is as if her leading theologians were at last taking seriously Jesus' rejoinder to the religious establishment when they asked him if he were the Christ: "*You* have said so" (Matt. 26:64). That is, the foundational crisis within Catholic Christianity has a lot to do with the fact that, as far as one can humanly discern, Jesus went to his death without knowing (or wishing) that his followers would soon declare him the founder and titular head of Christianity, not to mention the consubstantial Son of God.

The essay that I published in the *New York Review of Books* (June 14) and that evoked the responses of David Tracy and Andrew M. Greeley in *Commonweal* (August 10) dealt with this foundational crisis in Catholic Christianity. The essay was centered on the question of Jesus' alleged Resurrection from

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the dead (none of the *Commonweal* respondents has chosen to discuss that matter) and also touched on the discrepancy between what Jesus of Nazareth apparently thought he was (a special but very human prophet) and what orthodox Catholic believers now take him to be (the divine Son of God, eternally consubstantial with the Father and the Holy Spirit).

This problem, if it is one, is hardly new to Christian theology, and easy answers are ready to hand. Traditional theologians (though their tribe is decreasing) solve the problem by asserting that their Savior was quite literally of two minds about himself. Though he was only one person, he had both a divine and a human nature, each with a distinct intellect; and even if his human self-understanding was not immediately aware of his full divine nature, he did know, in his Chalcedonian *divine* mind, who and what he really was.

Another solution, distinct from but connected with the first one, is to assert that Christian faith knows more about who Jesus really was than scientific history can ascertain. According to this thesis, historical research gives us only the "historical" Jesus (it would be better to say: the *historiographical* Jesus) — that is, only those aspects of him that are available via historico-critical method — but not the real Jesus who actually lived two millennia ago. But, unlike the faithless historian, the believing Christian supposedly knows that the real Jesus actually *was* the ontological Son of God and somehow was aware of that fact.

But this solution is illusory, and I am quite sure that, despite appearances, David Tracy cannot possibly be proposing it in his response. Faith provides the believer with no more information about the real Jesus than normal historical experience does. Christian believers do not have "more" data or "higher" facts at their disposal; rather, they experience the same data as everyone else but interpret them in a different way. That is, the body of Christian doctrine is simply one of many possible (and equally valid) interpretations of the universally available empirical data, whether that be data about the world or oneself or Jesus of Nazareth. What Christians call "revelation" is not a content, a supernatural body of higher information that is given over to the faithful while being kept hidden from nonbelievers. It is only a particular hermeneutical principle and situation — a historically relative "form" or "asfactor" — in terms of which Christians interpret (with no demonstrable advantage) the same data and information that are available to everyone else.

Now, on the basis of the information available to believer and nonbeliever alike, Jesus of Nazareth — the one who actually lived and died — was clearly not much of a Christian, certainly not a good Catholic, and apparently quite oblivious to his alleged status as the divine Son of God. It is instructive to bracket Chalcedon for a moment and to consider *this* Jesus, the quite human prophet from Galilee whom Father Walter Kasper, in his impeccably orthodox *Jesus the Christ* (Paulist, 1977), describes under the title "The Earthly Jesus" (pp. 65-121), the same man to whom Father Edward Schillebeeckx devotes over two-hundred pages in his *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology* (Crossroad, 1979).

WHAT WOULD happen if this Jesus, as reconstructed by these and other Catholic theologians, were to show up on earth today exactly as he was before and join the Roman Catholic church that claims to be founded by him? He would probably be unable to pass the simple catechism tests that parochial school children take about him and therefore, even though he had instituted the Holy Eucharist, would not be allowed to make his First Communion. He would almost certainly flunk the courses in christology that are taught in Catholic seminaries, and therefore, even though he supposedly instituted Holy Orders, could not be ordained a priest. And if he were simply to go about preaching as he once did in Galilee, he would run a considerable risk that, given the Vatican's current feelings about orthodoxy, the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith would declare him a heretic (or at least bar him from a chair in Catholic theology) for not believing that he himself was God.

This is so ironic that it calls for adding a page to Dostoyevski's "Grand Inquisitor": The church, citing St. Mark's Gospel (14:64), says that the Sanhedrin condemned Jesus to death for claiming to be the Christ, the Son of God. Today the church herself (or at least Cardinal Ratzinger) might condemn him for *not* believing he was.

I pose this dilemma not out of disrespect for Jesus or Christian faith, but simply to draw attention to one of the major gains of liberal Catholic theology over the last three decades: the realization that Christianity cannot and need not trace its origins directly back to Jesus but only to Jesus' disciples. That is, there is no demonstrable, necessary continuity between Jesus of Nazareth's self-understanding while he was alive and the christologies which believers created to interpret him after he was dead. On the contrary, all the available evidence points towards discontinuity.

There is no doubt that something dramatic happened to Jesus' *reputation* after he died. His disciples soon came to believe that he was alive in heaven and eventually proclaimed him as the equal of God himself. That much is historical fact, observable by anyone who studies the documents. But Christians go further and assert that something dramatic happened not just to Jesus' reputation but principally to *Jesus himself*: he actually *was* raised from the dead and now reigns as God in heaven. But that, of course, is not an observable historical fact; it is a claim of faith.

Believers argue that the post-mortem enhancement of Jesus' reputation, from failed prophet to divine cosmocrator, was not a pure invention but the church's gradual realization of what Jesus had always been. But the truth of the matter seems to lie somewhere between invention and discovery. On the one hand we can establish with a high degree of historical certitude that the church did not concoct christology out of absolutely nothing; but on the other hand no one can prove (and no believer would want to) that Jesus actually was the divine savior that Christianity eventually took him to be. The in-between truth is that the early christologies were an extension and enhancement of what *Simon and the original disciples believed* that Jesus had been and had done, *whether or not* that belief corre-

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sponded to what Jesus actually thought of himself and (if this were knowable) who he ontologically was.

One of the most important if least touted achievements of recent Catholic theology has been the recognition that it is both impossible and unnecessary for Christianity to show any inevitable connection between what went on in Jesus' mind when he was alive and what went on in Simon's mind after Jesus had died. Christianity begins with Simon, not with Jesus, and maintains itself through history by constant self-reference to Simon (and only indirectly to Jesus). Christianity essentially *is* its sense of historicity, its unique claim of historical continuity — but the continuum is *with Simon* rather than directly with Jesus. Anyone who chooses to preserve continuity (in whatever fashion) with Simon Peter's interpretation of Jesus can also rightly claim the title "Christian," even if he or she believes that Jesus is as dead as a doornail. For ultimately Jesus is not essential to Christianity. But Peter is.

THIS STATE of affairs underlies David Tracy's assertion that mainline Christianity (and therefore Catholicism) is based on a "fundamental trust in tradition" as that which mediates Christian faith through the ages. Tracy is, of course, correct. What is more, he is showing himself to be, in the best sense of the term, a conservative Christian, one who upholds the ideal and principle of all Christianity. That principle is: *ubi Petrus, ibi ecclesia* — Christianity is present wherever someone traces his or her faith back to Simon's. And having established his conservatism, that is, his option for mainline Christianity, Father Tracy also establishes his liberalism, that is, his scholarly good sense: he acknowledges that this fundamentally trusted tradition which binds him to Simon "is also, like all traditions, ambiguous and thereby in constant need of correction and self-reform."

All of this is well and good if one wants to remain, as David Tracy does, a liberal theologian within mainline Christianity. Tracy, to be sure, is one of the best of them. He, like Karl Rahner, Hans Küng, Edward Schillebeeckx, and the others (only a handful of whom I mentioned in the article) are intent not on destroying Christianity but on reinvigorating it while preserving continuity with the founding act of Christianity. That act is Simon Peter's identification of the fate of the Kingdom of God with the fate of Jesus himself, whether or not (for we shall never know and it doesn't matter) the content of Simon's faith corresponds to what Jesus had in mind.

In other words, Tracy the liberal is of one heart and mind with Tracy the conservative. And sooner or later the more traditional Catholic intellectuals will come to see that in Father Tracy and the other liberal theologians they have no enemies at all but only the staunchest advocates of the faith of Simon Peter and of those who claim to follow him. Eventually the traditionalists will recognize that the church's liberal theologians have brought her back to her conservative beginnings: to the line that separates what faith asserts from what history can prove. Some day traditionalists like Karol Wotyla and George Kelly will be glad that there are liberals in the church like David Tracy.

But having said that, I must say that the liberal position which Tracy advocates — correction and reform of the Christian tradition through the quasi-parliamentary procedure he describes — strikes me as an exercise in polishing brass on the Titanic. I hope that David, whom I prize and admire, will not be offended by my saying that. I acknowledge, of course, that within its own framework the reformism he proposes is a noble and worthy task, and in no way do I wish to belittle it. There is much good that can and will come from liberal theologies like his (for example, the eventual regrafting of the traditionalist Catholics onto the tree from which they are splitting off). Nonetheless, I think such liberalism misses the point.

IN ONE DEFINITION, a liberal is a conservative who has stretched his paradigm to its limit but refuses to transcend it. He cannot accept (or perhaps even conceive of) the undoing of the very system of which he is a part. All liberals, by nature, tinker: they accept and trust a tradition that has been handed

GREELEY'S AGNOSTICISM

HAVE STORY, WILL TRAVEL

I MUST CONFESS that Father Andrew Greeley's essay "The Ways of Knowing" (*Commonweal*, August 10) left me very puzzled indeed. I recognize, of course, that Father Greeley has demonstrated his competence in a great many fields, but clearly cognitional theory is indeed not one of them. Do we really "carry around in our brains explanatory 'pictures' of the world (models, symbols)" which we use to "impose meaning on the conflicting phenomena of our experience" and which we fit to the world like "templates"? Is model-fitting or story-telling in fact "the nature of human knowing as best we understand it today"? Who is this "we"? Father Greeley, of course, is entitled to such stories about how *he* knows. However, he should really think twice before invoking the names of Lonergan, Rahner, Polanyi, and Ricoeur in support of those charming simplicities.

But that aside, Father Greeley has proven the very point about liberal Catholicism that I made in my original essay. There I suggested that even if Jesus is dead and remains dead, the Resurrection story is nonetheless "the kind of myth that is indispensable for some human beings to get through their lives. . . . And if faith works to that end, who would want to fault it?"

Now, it is precisely this liberal Catholic "pious agnosticism" which turns out to be Andrew Greeley's own

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down to them, but they also reform, amend, correct, and enhance it. However, they never intentionally destroy it, no matter how much they might seem to, for if they did, they would destroy their very *raison d'être*, which is to be nothing more than brilliant and daring conservatives.

If all liberals tinker, liberal theologians tinker with Christianity. Some do it smoothly, others maladroitly. Often enough their work upsets traditional Catholic believers. But finally these are only minor Oedipal conflicts that end up with the more conservative father recognizing himself in his wilder son, while the son in turn comes to accept Dad and his ancient wisdom and values. Both of them are, after all, members of the same family, and as much as they fail in the effort, they really do want to love one other. And that is why they constantly beg each other, like deep calling to deep, "Son [or Dad], won't you please come home?"

Home is where Simon is; it is the Bark of Peter. The only problem is that Simon Peter missed the boat he should have taken and instead signed on as captain of the Titanic. That is, rather than leaving Jesus dead and then going on to live the Kingdom that Jesus had proclaimed, Simon hoped him out of the tomb and identified the Kingdom of God with the prophet who had preached it. In so doing, he took Jesus' message, in which the apocalyptic overlay was at a minimum, and reinserted it into an elaborate and mythical apocalyptic drama that cast Jesus as the eschatological judge who was soon to reappear in glory.

Here lie the origins — and the Original Sin — of Christianity: not the "Resurrection" (which virtually all modern theologians agree is a hermeneutical symbol rather than a historical event) but Simon's identification of the Kingdom of God with the man who had proclaimed it. Of course, Simon was smart enough, at least at the beginning, not to insist that Jesus had physically left his tomb, although that local and idiosyncratic legend would soon enough become a normative formulation (and for today's traditionalists, *the* normative

position. Notice the steps in his version of Christian faith.

First, in clear contrast to Lonergan, Rahner, and the First Vatican Council, Father Greeley proclaims his own intellectual agnosticism. "By definition," he tells us, "the ultimate cannot be rationally or scientifically considered." (He makes the same point in his little tract *What a Modern Catholic Believes about God*, Thomas More Press, p. 9ff.)

Second, even though he is finally an intellectual agnostic, Greeley remains a pious one. Everyone, he says, necessarily has a religion, which is simply "a story of ultimate reality", or a "set of symbols which uniquely claims to explain the ultimate meaning of life." Hegel might have no problem with that definition, nor would a bona fide modernist of the sort condemned by Pius X.

Third, the truth-criteria, he says, for such stories are highly personal but basically pragmatic. A religious story is "true" (or at least "provisionally valid") when it is "useful," that is, "when it fits the data of experience well enough to help one to direct one's actions in the necessary encounter with further experience" (p. 432).

Now, maybe some modern Catholics can live with this kind of Unitarianism in which, as Father Greeley says, "the pushy Jewish God of the Christians" is "a symbol of man's interpretative scheme — his meaning system" and in fact is "man's mythological way of stating his faith about the nature of Reality" (*What a Modern Catholic Believes. . . .* pp. 36 and 89).

And with the proper upbeat interpretation, almost anyone could agree with Greeley's coda to the story about the Resurrection. "The real question is not so much wtether we believe that Jesus rose from the dead," he tells us, "but whether we believe that we too shall rise" (*The Great Mysteries: An Essential Catechism*, Seabury, p. 46). That is, the bottomline of the Christian story is the hope that "love is stronger than death." Not bad, that.

In short, Greeley's approach to Christianity is a rewrite of the old Italian adage, *Se non è vero, è ben trovato*: "Whether or not it's true, it's a good story." Or rather, he turns the adage around: "Whatever is a good story is true." Christianity according to Father Greeley is a useful tale, a nice myth (Nietzsche might say: a necessary error) for getting through the day.

I have nothing against this kind of ecumenical Rotarianism, even when it is presented in the guise of modern Catholicism. I can certainly affirm that it is pragmatically "true" if it helps people live meaningful, fruitful lives; and I want to applaud it insofar as it assists, for example, Polish workers and Salvadoran guerrillas in their struggles for justice. But like some other people, I fail to see what it has to say that is unique or that cannot be found outside Christian experience and teaching. And pious agnostics like Father Greeley have yet to tell us.

Speaking of bottom lines, I suspect Andrew Greeley is terribly afraid that something very important to him might be taken away by those of us who reject his broadminded version of liberal Catholicism. Let me, therefore, assure him to the contrary:

Whether or not the emperor has any clothes, Father Greeley is still allowed to believe (as per his article, p. 433) that history will have a happy ending, that God is intimately present to him, and that she loves him (as he insisted, she "damn well better") with the tender passion of a mother. That really isn't a bad story to travel with. But we'll leave it to others to decide how much, if at all, this civil-religion-cum-feeling has to do with Catholicism, Christianity, and the message of Jesus of Nazareth.

THOMAS SHEEHAN

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formulation) of Christian faith. In any case, those who want to sail with Simon have their course already charted for them. It is that basic Christian creed of which the two parts are tautological: "We believe (1) *in* Jesus Christ (2) *with* Simon Peter."

MEANWHILE THOSE who, for whatever reasons, choose not to go home to Peter might still want to consider the simple but powerful message of the Kingdom of God that was preached by the Jesus who died and remains dead: that God's future has become present (Luke 11:20), that religion has disappeared into mercy (Matt. 9:13), and that eschatology has been dissolved into the tasks of justice and compassion (Matt. 25:40).

What may finally happen to the Catholic church or Christianity is, in the long run, a trivial question. I would have thought that *according to its own teachings* the church was meant to pass away, that Christianity was made to dissolve, and that the sole purpose of theology was to help people leave the church with a good conscience. But such a task requires a fundamental *suspicion* of the Christian tradition more than a fundamental trust in it. What we need to do today is not to correct and reform the tradition so much as (in Heidegger's sense of the term) to "destroy" it and retrieve what it has concealed.

Today the point is not, as it was in Cardinal d'Ailly's time, to save Catholic Christianity at all costs, but rather to find out what it left unseen and unsaid, even if that entails letting Christianity die, as Jesus did. But for that, something more than angelic liberalism is required: a dose of the post-liberal devil.

A TEXTBOOK SOLUTION

New houses from schoolhouses

J.S. FUERST & SAM MANCUSO

NEITHER CONVENTIONAL public housing nor government subsidized housing is having much success in the United States under the current national administration — nor did it under its immediate predecessors. Today in Chicago, this seems to be doubly true; although in spite of problems at the Chicago Housing Authority (CHA), and a lack of experience, there seems to be an administration that cares.

The housing needs of low and moderate income families are prodigious in a period of 9 percent unemployment, still very high inflation, a stalled housing industry, and a federal government that thinks we have no significant housing shortage.

Simultaneously, with this housing problem, there has been a nationwide decline in birth rates, plus enough population change to cause many elementary and some high school closings. It has been estimated that in the last few years there have been from 7,000 to 10,000 school closings. Many of these buildings are in usable physical condition.

But one man's poison can be another man's meat. One of the biggest problems faced by local housing authorities is finding sites for public housing that can be acquired without community objection. Experience throughout the country suggests that these closed schools can provide housing — even public housing — for elderly persons or small families.

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These "closed" schools are of two types.

First, there are schools built since 1950, usually one or two stories high with many large windows, reasonably high ceilings, and all the safety precautions that cities can impose. These buildings are often in "recently" developed outlying areas which have matured and where birth rates have declined leaving fewer children in the neighborhood and many half-empty classrooms. A good many are in Black neighborhoods where population growth resulted in a batch of new schools from 1950 to 1970 and then declined, when areas lost much of their population through fires, severe housing deterioration and abandonment.

Second are older buildings constructed from 1880 to 1940, frequently three to five stories high. Most of them are very solidly built; a substantial number are on the Register of Historical Properties. These schools vary greatly in their state of repair, depending on their location, the care they have received, and how long they have been closed. Schools remaining unoccupied for too long deteriorate and are vandalized. Many of these older schools are of particular interest for redevelopment since they are in "conservation" neighborhoods and are either in a stage of arrested development or a process of gentrification.

Both these "newer" and older schools provide real opportunities for rehabilitation into livable housing. Unfortunately, until there are changes in court rulings (or at least housing authority administrative rulings), and there is some legislative facilitation, such solutions are significantly hampered in Chicago.

During the last fifteen years, since the Gautreaux decision,

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the typical public housing permitted in Chicago (which has all been miniscule) has been two- to six-unit developments known as scattered sites. Such an approach is like dipping up the ocean with a teaspoon. School-housing conversions, however, could conceivably avoid some of the shackles with which Gautreaux has confined the city. Among the other restrictions imposed by Gautreaux was a virtual interdiction on new housing in Black or mixed areas (at least until the lawyers were satisfied with the number built in White areas) to discontinue the practice of ghetto public housing that previous CHA administrations had adopted since 1955. Since many closed schools amenable to housing conversion are in Black or mixed areas, they could easily fall under the Gautreaux interdiction.

The post-1950 schools are the easier to convert with their thirty-by-thirty-foot classrooms becoming a roomy one-bedroom apartment. The main problem with the majority of these in the outlying or suburban areas is not economic or architectural but psychological-political; there is community anxiety over low to moderate income families, perhaps even minorities, being introduced in the neighborhood.

To some extent, the problems confronting such conversions are real. In neighborhoods of almost exclusively single-family dwellings, proposals to allow multi-family housing apartments or condos occupied by seniors or families, whether publicly or privately financed, have evoked outcries over the destruction of community character and property values. Every objection from overburdened utilities, overcrowded schools and street traffic to insufficient police protection to serve the perceived transient character of the additional population has been hurled at the developer to halt the necessary zoning changes. In some instances, it may be that elimination of the school playground where there are no other play facilities in the neighborhood might cause hardship. Generally, however, such problems as open space can be solved by discussion and negotiation, particularly in outlying neighborhoods. In most instances objections have been motivated by class or racial concerns. The fact is that more than half of the units built in the Chicago suburbs from 1965 to 1975 were multi-unit developments. Neither the suburbs nor the outlying areas simply remained bastions of single family houses. However, this still leaves open the question of introducing elderly persons or families of low to moderate income into these areas via subsidized housing. There is little question that obtaining a public housing development is infinitely easier if the land and building are already publicly owned as are these schools.

PERHAPS the most publicized school-housing conversion is the Central Grammar School of Gloucester, Massachusetts. The architects were Anderson, Notter, and Finegold, and the developer was Kirk Noyes, also of Gloucester. The school was purchased by the Gloucester Development team for $95,000 after it had been offered to and turned down by the Gloucester Housing Authority. The site is close to downtown, to shopping and commercial areas, to the library and post office. In addition to locational advantages, this *fin de siècle* building has tall mullioned windows, lofty ceilings, wide corridors, and ample stairways and exits. The architects, moreover, incorporated tradition in their room configuration rather than destroying it — all for $22,500 per unit (1975) with rents from $185 to $215 per month.

From the outset, the building has proved to be an enormous success. All eighty units were rented in two days, there has never been a vacancy, and up to 1982 there had only been one rent increase. The development has received four national design awards, and favorable publicity in *Newsweek* and on C.B.S. In short, while the Van der Rohe slogan of modern architecture says "less is more," the Central Grammar slogan is "more for less." Housing developments similar to Central Grammar have been developed in Amherst, Lexington, and Boston, Massachusetts; Lynchburg, Virginia; New Britain, Connecticut; Minneapolis, Minnesota; New York City; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Indianapolis, Indiana; Warren, Michigan; Lake Forest, Illinois; Tiburon and San Francisco, California.

Many of these conversions are now medium-priced rentals or condominiums, but clearly the question of whether to convert to high- or low-priced housing is a matter of social policy rather than one of architecture or economics. Architects and developers like Noyes and Brubaker of Perkins and Will find this kind of conversion challenging because it allows them to work with unconventional buildings, buildings with fire places, stained glass windows, interior exposed brick and the like.

Although a major question revolves around costs, and these vary considerably, the square foot cost of a building cheaply acquired seems to be about 15 to 20 percent lower than new apartment construction. Noyes says that inexpensive acquisition is one of the pluses because both parties to the transaction are in the public sphere and costs are substantially lower than other alternatives.

One of the problems that James Rydeen, a Minnesota developer of such conversions, stresses is that a number of schools offered are too small to make multi-family unit conversion economical. Noyes surmounted the problem of smallness in Lynchburg, Virginia, by combining two nearby school properties into one development making the project economically viable. This compromise made it possible for the local housing authority to introduce a development of multi-family units with low- and moderate-income families into a gentrified area

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of young professionals with beautiful large homes and well-kept neighborhoods.

Another method of handling small schools which do not seem economically viable to develop by themselves is to build additional units on the same site. For example, John La Fata in Warren, Michigan, explains that while he "broke even" on the school-to-housing conversion of thirty-five units for the elderly he acquired in the process "for free" land worth $600,000 to $700,000 on which he built 120 two-bedroom units. Similarly in Newtonville, Massachusetts, Sasaki and Associates successfully converted thirteen condominiums from the handsome Clafton Park school and completed the complex by building twelve additional new townhouses. In short, many small conversions are the nucleus for larger developments.

What do developers like about conversion? First, good location. Schools are usually in residential areas. Second, the buildings are generally of sound quality. They were constructed with good materials and in full compliance with building codes. Third, good density. There is usually a playground attached to the school building providing considerable open land around the built-up area. Fourth, schools often evidence ingenious and imaginative design. More space and character are possible in converted school apartments than in typical new flats for comparable costs. Fifth, low acquisition cost and a broadening of the local tax base through new residents. Sixth, preservation of landmarks. Many older schools are architectural landmarks, an economically significant fact since it adds a 25 percent depreciation factor for a private developer even if the property is converted into subsidized housing. Seventh, they are labor intensive. By and large rehabilitation requires more expenditures for manpower than materials. Eight, they save time. Barring bureaucratic complications at the outset, acquisition, building and even renting time is short. This translates into less interest paid by the developer. And ninth, marketability. Virtually all schools converted into housing have been rented in record time.

With these advantages why are there not more conversions? Essentially there has been a shortage of money available for any kind of low- or moderate-income housing. In 1982-83 Senator John Heinz of Pennsylvania introduced a bill to re-use old school buildings. This bill will defray 80 percent of the cost of renovating schools for public use. Part of the hold-up is a lack of financing models. Insofar as projects are private for-profit ventures, they can be conventionally financed and marketed as rentals or condominiums. Since school conversion is novel and somewhat imaginative, lenders are somewhat skittish. With the limited financing available, conventional financing has predominated because of the lack of government funds, the lack of housing authority initiative and the relative reluctance of communities to accept the rezoning prerequisite to convert schools into low-moderate subsidized housing.

One area in which communities have apparently softened their opposition to subsidized housing is to units for the elderly, a direction in which most subsidized (Section 8) school-housing conversions has gone. Many schools could be converted into small-family units without conversion since most units could house a couple with one or two children at the very most, avoiding the fears of inundation.

If the roadblocks to public housing, are to be removed, unused school property put to use, new taxes evoked, and low- and moderate-income families provided housing, these vacant schools provide the resource immediately at hand.

Screen

STRANGE BETA-FELLOWS

FAMILIARITY BREEDS—& BREEDS

ONE LINE quoted from a movie critic in a newspaper advertisement sums up the cinema's summer of discontent: "Move over, *Porky's, Revenge of the Nerds* is the social misfits' *Rocky*." Now it is understandable that an ad would advance no claim to profundity on behalf of *Nerds*, but it's not too much to suppose that moviemakers still try to be original, and curious therefore that one critic, at least, believes this movie's merit lies in its resemblance to *two* other films. Such praise underlines the defect of most summer movies this year, an outrageous aping of previous successes, especially successes won with younger audiences.

The basic reason for the imitativeness is simple. With production costs so inflated, especially because of reliance on special effects, experiment and innovation have become prohibitively risky, and studios stick to sure bets at the risk of snores. Hence sequels like *Indiana Jones, Conan the Destroyer,* and *The Search for Spock, Star Trek III*; hence also spin-offs like *Gremlins* (*E.T.* turned nasty) or *The Karate Kid* (an adolescent, albeit improved, *Rocky*). Especially derivative are "hi-tech" movies such as *Electric Dreams*, where a computer falls in love with a beautiful musician (mixing elements of MTV with the mad machine motif from *War Games*). Or take *The Last Starfighter*, where a teenager living in a trailer park plays video spaceship battles so well that he is dragged to another galaxy for the real thing — a medley of motifs from *War Games* (again), *Tron*, and *Star Wars*. In *Cloak and Dagger*, Henry Thomas, formerly of *E.T.* and Dabney Coleman, formerly of *War Games*, perform down-to-earth heroics by preventing secret plans for a new bomber from being whisked out of the country in — you guessed it — an Atari tape cartridge.

Perhaps the graphics of these movies can be distinguished, but their plots seem clones, or, as the robot-duplicates are termed in *The Last Starfighter*, beta-partners. "I'm going nuts, I think I'm talking to a machine," the hero of *Electric Dreams* laments; little does he know he is simply trapped in typical contemporary filmmaking: hi-tech, low-mind. Or, alternatively, as the beta-partner of the hero of *The Last Star-*

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fighter puts it when "his" younger brother observes him one midnight calmly unscrewing his head, "Go back to sleep. You're just having a bad dream."

The action in many of these films boils down to a simple formula: adolescents have an heroic responsibility to save Western civilization from evil meanies. Their deeds are not just indispensable in space or in supernatural fantasylands, or when computers or tape cartridges run amok or amiss, but also in political-military thrillers like the recent *Red Dawn*, with its imagined invasion of Colorado by Communists from Latin America. Indeed, how different is *Red Dawn* from *Gremlins*? In both, nasty invaders attack one of those ever unsuspecting, perfectly pastoral American towns; in both, after killing various adults (one notes the first to go are high school teachers), the invaders are themselves knocked off by adolescents-turned-warriors. Types like James Bond or Errol Flynn used to perform this kind of role; now teenagers inherit the screen.

The exception, *Ghostbusters*, proves the rule. An amusing send-up of a decade of fantasy, the film is set in a hip, nonpastoral New York, with plenty of shots of singles' parties and upscale locations. But its real location is a familiar address, the well mapped border between reality and Other, here with ancient Babylonian devils taking up residence on Central Park West. Bill Murray, moreover, is perfect in the role of ace Ghostbuster precisely because he pretends to be an older adolescent, a cynical ex-post-grad research associate (tossed out, one notes, from Columbia). On the evil empire that here rears its ugly head, he turns not just laser beams but his awesome weapon of age, nonchalant deadpan blarney. Except for that, *Ghostbusters* conforms to pattern: it's Yuppies against the Universe, one more apocalyptic battle between American David and foreign Goliath, and strictly no contest.

GIVEN THIS context, it's easy to understand how some critics get excited over the rare serious film, and are accordingly tempted to overpraise it. Such generally is the case with *The Bostonians*, a film version of Henry James's novel by producer Ismail Merchant, director James Ivory, and screenwriter Ruth Prawer Jhabvala — a team that previously collaborated on such literate, picturesque films as last year's *Heat and Dust* and the earlier adaptation from James, *The Europeans*. Things move slowly in Merchant-Ivory-Jhabvala productions — slowly but thoughtfully, with delicious attention to antique settings, sensuous color, and authentic costume. Unfortunately, *The Bostonians* needed far more, particularly tighter structure and energetic pacing. I wanted to like *The Bostonians*; I found it a bore.

The movie details the emergence of the women's movement from abolitionism just after the Civil War, and centers on a peculiar emotional triangle: a Brahmin feminist, Olive Chancellor (here played by Vanessa Redgrave); a young spokesperson for the new cause, Verena Tarrant (here played by unknown Madelaine Potter); and a handsome Southern cousin of Miss Chancellor, Basil Ransom (here played by Christopher Reeve, trying to escape from Superman clothes). Whatever Reeve and Potter managed in the film, they were bound to be overshadowed by Redgrave, with her long years of experience in playing suffering heroines, particularly those like the neurotic Olive. These casting choices, however, only create an initial imbalance that every other aspect of the adaptation worsens, spoiling the film's dramatic tension and enervating its tempo.

James's original story had no particularly sympathetic characters, but was, at least, balanced. Olive clings to Verena, an ingenue whose faith-healing, mesmerist father had trained her to speak powerfully on public issues. Unfortunately, Olive also brings Basil to one of Verena's lectures, hoping to convert him to sympathy toward feminism; instead, he pursues Verena, partly in lust and partly in revenge for the destruction of Southern chivalry by Northern "ideas" in the war. The Southern angle is important to James; Basil wants to get at Boston and all it represents. Yet, as ugly as Basil's motives are, James makes Boston little better: it seems the headquarters of quacks, charlatans, and professional crusaders looking for a cause. Unsurprisingly, the novel sold poorly, its tone falling flat with an American audience not yet used to the severe equation that James borrowed from Flaubert: two times zero equals zero.

No film adaptation has to be faithful to the novel on which it is based. But tinkering with James's nuances can be dangerous and can throw his tearful symmetries out of alignment. For example, Christopher Reeve looks like an appropriate Basil Ransom, complete with his "Snidely Whiplash" seducer's mustache, and he can truly draw hisses with his sweetly voiced desire to "lock up" Verena "all to myself." But Reeve is also an improved Ransom: he is no revengeful Southerner trying to snake his way toward victory, but sincere in a conventional romantic manner. His chauvinism is muted, in short, and shorn of its cultural and geographical angle. The only thing "Southern" in Reeve is his archly authentic accent, an elaborately dignified drawl that does nothing to hasten the movie's pace.

Basil Ransom is less interesting in the film than in the novel, a change that throws all the dramatic interest on the female characters. But Verena at least cannot sustain it: Madelaine Potter is given little to do but flutter back and forth between an increasingly resentful Olive and a persistent Basil, often repeating the exact same lines: "Just ten minutes," she pleads to Olive at least several times, or "An hour, an hour, at most," she warns Basil as they jaunt off together. The scenes seem tediously repetitive, and the character of Verena — one of James's strong naifs, with powerful reserves of sincerity and simplicity — seems little more than a yo-yo.

Nature abhors a vacuum, and by default, Olive Chancellor becomes the center of the film. The problem is that her emotional center is a lugubrious paralysis of will which becomes not just unpleasant to observe but even — despite some potential dramatic material — uninteresting. Olive is an enormous self-contradiction: physically imposing and strong-minded in her education of Verena into centuries of female oppression, she never assumes any power in the outside world, and is rarely forced to confront her own self-denial. The filmmakers may have sensed this: they have at least added an ending that

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shows Olive finally taking public action. But if Olive was to be this important, she should have been more complicated from the beginning of the film: we should have seen more internal conflict, and less obsession. Much of Redgrave's performance simply consists in long shots of her sitting by a window, mournfully waiting for Verena to return. Like Redgrave, the movie just sits there, with the implication that all this is somehow worth our interest, and maybe even noble. Nothing like James's irony lightens this heaviness, certainly not Redgrave's apparent zeal for the role of social crusader and martyr. Is it possible that she identified too closely?

The most interesting characters in *The Bostonians*, the only life in the party, are Dr. Prance, a no-nonsense woman doctor, Miss Birdseye, a Boston do-gooder who keeps her humor about her; and Mrs. Burrage, a New York matron who patronizes feminism in an 1870s version of radical chic. These roles are played respectively by Linda Hunt, Jessica Tandy, and Nancy Marchand, three professionals who know how to take a back seat when they see one. Vanessa Redgrave either doesn't know such restraint or wasn't directed toward it. The result is bathos.

TOM O'BRIEN

(Beginning with this issue, Tom O'Brien will serve as Commonweal*'s regular movie critic.)*

Books: UNRAVELING AMERICA'S WAY

THE UNRAVELING OF AMERICA:
A HISTORY OF LIBERALISM IN THE 1960s
Allen J. Matusow
Harper & Row, $22, 542 pp.

A TIME OF PASSION:
AMERICA, 1960-1980
Charles R. Morris
Harper & Row, $17.50, 270 pp.

TROUBLED JOURNEY:
FROM PEARL HARBOR TO RONALD REAGAN
Frederick F. Siegel
Hill and Wang, $17.50, 289 pp.

Jim Sleeper

BENEATH THE crosscurrents of learned conjecture that are the writing of academic history, the movements of the 1960s still surge like dangerous undertows. The essentially liberal discourse of the academy seems to stutter into incoherence before the specter of the sixties' illiberal eruptions in its midst.

For almost a decade following the appearance of naive celebrations like Charles Reich's *The Greening of America*, neoconservative revisionism roundly condemned the New Left, the counterculture, black power, and third world insurgencies, subjecting those movements to standards their dwindling defenders rejected as hypocritical and "bourgeois." The neoconservatives did manage to convince most of us that the upheavals of that fateful decade weren't mere consequences of, and certainly not effective responses to, the "oppression" the rebels claimed to find all around them.

What those movements really were, however, and what they revealed of the fault lines in the dominant liberal dispensation, went largely unexplained. *Something* extraordinarily painful and promising animated millions of Americans, and one sometimes suspects that we as a nation haven't resolved the sixties' wrenching dilemmas as much as we've fled them.

It is probably symptomatic that Allen J. Matusow, professor of American history and dean of humanities at Rice University, the most "established" historian of the writers considered here, does a competent job of tracking the sixties' regnant liberalism by its own articulated standards, but he loses course and heads for trouble when he tries to take the measure of profoundly illiberal rebellions with the equipment at his command:

> . . . Critics had attacked the hippies as hedonistic and narcissistic. By the 1970s social discipline was eroding so rapidly that fashion condemned the whole of middle-class culture as the "culture of narcissism." . . . In the long run, though it proved ephemeral, the hippie movement was profoundly significant, portending as it did the erosion of liberal values that has sustained bourgeois society, the character type that had been its foundation, and the ethic that had undergirded efforts to accomplish its reform.

Not only are these wooden cadences ineffective; there is something eerie about their detachment. Better Midge Decter's cut-and-slash polemics! The very writing of liberal history like Matusow's presupposes the values, character type, and ethic he tells us are gone. What sense can it make, then, of the illiberal currents of the decade? What regenerative power can it offer, what searchlight into the post-Enlightenment mists? Better the soundings of Hunter Thompson or Joan Didion, reporting candidly from *within* the "unraveling" which Matusow pretends to survey from a vantage point unwashed by the period's high tides.

And much better, surely, the saving irony and, one suspects, profound faith of non-academic Charles Morris; his sheer imaginative honesty, grounded in experience as a 1960s front-line administrator of urban programs, lets him dissect the period's "excesses" with a wry, classical stoicism and a slightly mischievous moral edge that retains its optimism within a sense of its own limits. Better, finally, the longer, postwar view taken by Frederick Siegel, a young historian who construes the past forty years of American history as a contention among deeply rooted political mythologies thrown into conflict by an emerging corporate political economy.

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THE IRONY is that academic liberalism like Matusow's isn't entirely without resources to account for its own delegitimation. Early on, Matusow identifies but then abandons a potentially revelatory fissure within postwar liberalism itself: the Kennedy intellectuals fled a profoundly challenging liberalism of mixed existentialist and old republican pedigree, embracing instead the almost manic optimism and glorified pragmatism of Camelot, with its government of charisma (a parody of existential heroism) and its mad-rationalism as elaborated by Robert McNamara (a perverse caricature of traditional Yankee efficiency). Among the Camelot men, only Robert Kennedy seems to have become troubled by that flight as he confronted real heroes like Martin Luther King and the best republican traditions of the anti-war movement.

What brought on the establishment's betrayal of liberalism? Was there actually something of a suppressed, perhaps more authentic strain of American liberalism in the eruptions of the late sixties? We never learn.

Matusow concludes his book with the ascendancy of Ronald Reagan to the White House:

> Whether Reagan's victory made permanent the trend away from the liberalism of John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson, whether his conservative policies could weave together the unraveled fabric of the old America, even whether the old America was something that ought to be recovered — these questions were bound to engage historians far into the nation's future.

Those of us whose fate it is to live in the present, and who suspect that conservative revisionist wisdom is more destructive of our future than the admittedly ambiguous, unresolved legacies of the sixties, will have to turn elsewhere for a lifeline from that decade to the years ahead.

CHARLES MORRIS throws one such lifeline out to those who know how to grasp it. He says he's on a "personal exploration" of those "momentous changes" between 1960 and 1980 which happen to interest him. The absence of grand pretense is refreshing, though his horizons are actually broader than Matusow's.

A non-academic — in fact, an impressive autodidact with broad government and banking experience, Morris has no obligations in *A Time of Passion* to anything except whatever notions of honor, community, and progress he manages to evoke and sustain. In this he is the quintessential liberal of the kind the Camelot men were not, wearing his notions, if not lightly, then at least not ponderously, and finding it within himself to give other persons and movements their due — so long, of course, as they attract his broad curiosity in the first place.

The title of Morris's 1980 book, *The Cost of Good Intentions*, a study of the failure of New York City's liberal experiment during the sixties, primed many to think of him as a neoconservative. Nor was that expectation dispelled for some readers of paragraphs like this one about New York City in 1966:

> Crime and violence . . . were overwhelmingly black. Most drug addicts were Puerto Rican and black. . . . If public housing projects were increasingly unlivable and crime-ridden, it was because of their new black and Puerto Rican tenants . . . firemen wasted their resources chasing false alarms set by black and Puerto Rican children. . . . The illegitimacy, venereal disease, child abuse, broken families, and juvenile delinquency that swamped the city social agencies were concentrated in black and Puerto Rican families. . . .

But there was something else at work in these lines besides a cold, empirical anger: the confidence of a writer raising his family in integrated, even "changing" neighborhoods and schools, and standing without sentiment on the authority of his experiences as a Trenton state poverty-program staffer, Washington state prison administrator, and New York City welfare director, who worked with minority professionals in cinder-block offices on problems whose seriousness *they* would never have denied.

The Lord calls out: "Is there anyone here who yearns for life and desires to see good days?"

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Similarly, in *A Time of Passion*, Morris almost flaunts his lack of sentimentality about the hard problems he lives with by choice, both personally and professionally:

> The great majority [of Americans] most parted company from the liberal elite in their view of blacks and civil rights. I learned to appreciate the gap between liberal doctrine and reality about 1970 — from my oldest son, who was then six or seven. . . . He had worked out a rather careful set of distinctions. About half his playmates and best friends were black [one wonders how many of Morris's detractors could make that statement] so he wasn't a racist. He knew that all black kids did not steal bikes, but he also knew that, in his experience, the kids who stole bikes were black. He knew that some of his black friends were smarter in school than he was, but he also knew that the disruptive kids, and the kids who couldn't or wouldn't do the work, were black. He knew that white kids didn't steal your lunch money, but he learned the hard way to be on his guard when he met black kids he didn't know on his way to school.

Morris is quick to acknowledge that the key variable behind these distinctions was class, not race — the white kids in this, as in many integrated neighborhoods, tended to be middle class, the disruptive black kids poor. But the question I think he really wants to pose to liberals and the left is, what does it cost us, politically and programmatically, not to admit the evidence of our senses and work from there? What adherents do we gain, and whom do we help, by fudging the empirical truth? If there is anything upon which Morris casts a cold eye, it is the left's perennial anticipatory flutterings over every real or imagined stirring among minorities and workers, followed by convoluted explanations of why the stirring failed to become a progressive movement, why the subject population failed to break through one or another layer of false consciousness to perceive its "true" class interest.

The irony here is that Morris's unflinching realism about the disappointing conditions and consciousness of the oppressed gives him both the perspective and the credibility to develop indictments of the postwar liberal dispensation that really stick. *The Cost of Good Intentions*, even as it overdid just a bit its author's delight in skewering liberal mystification, purveyed in the sheer honesty of its reportage a ringing defense of the public sector. Morris documented the villainy of unscrupulous private providers who bid up costs to the city (in health care, for example); he pointed out that "efficiency" in public services could mean *increased*, not lessened, costs ("more efficient garbage collection is no saving, if the city would have otherwise merely left the garbage on the street"); and he insisted on the necessity of providing more public services (more thorough education, for example) in a complex urban environment.

A Time of Passion carries these hard lessons into the national arena, testing the sound and fury of the sixties' movements against them. Morris knows he's going to come up with better arguments than the various radical movements did for their own causes, and he does; especially searing is his description of the Kennedy/Johnson intellectuals' "psychological" approach to the Vietnam War, which traded blood for appearances in ways that make one wonder anew why the grand strategists of that effort are still at large in our universities. And Morris essentially affirms the connection the New Left always made between the multiversity's bureaucratic "dehumanization" and the bureaucratic banality of the war, spotlighting the worm (or Leviathan) in liberalism itself, the mad-rational gangsterism anticipated by Max Weber and Franz Kafka and evoked in anti-war mythology.

But once again, as the book's title at least faintly implies, Morris's targets are less the obvious villains identified by the rebels than the rebels' own histrionics, which led so inevitably to incapacitating distortion and despair. And, once again, he is even harder on self-righteously passionate liberals than on radicals, whose foibles are so painful and obvious in hindsight. He argues, for example, that liberals mounted hysterical denunciations of Nixon's shabby but ultimately cannier approach to ending *their* war primarily to displace their own gnawing guilt as architects of the anti-Communist crusade in Southeast Asia.

Similarly, Morris stands his ground as a veteran welfare administrator when he scores liberals for their role in killing Nixon's Family Assistance Plan — "an absolutely direct approach" to getting people out of poverty, "both conservative and radical at the same time."

Morris's chastening empiricism about "the achievable" drives him to some philosophical reflections, and here he surely transcends Matusow's deferral of great questions for "future historians." In one sense, Morris does little more than demonstrate the irreducible "complexity," as he calls it, of all the central challenges, from racism to militarism, and invoke "maturity" as the only appropriate posture before the intractables of demographics, natural cycles, economic development, and, yes, human nature as he has found it among inmates, bureaucrats, investors, and the unemployed.

In another sense, though, as Morris fills out such abstractions in his grounded, luminous prose, he brings to life that strain of existential and republican liberalism which Camelot so cavalierly suppressed and which Matusow leaves submerged in his narrative of clashes between the liberal elitists and the "radical" extremists.

I suspect that it was from this older postwar liberalism, exiled, outraged, violated, that the movements of the 1960s drew their first, best strength. It was this twilight liberalism, conceived in the shadow of the Holocaust, "on the other side of despair," with its resistance to "atomized" mass culture, which found its way from Lionel Trilling's darker musings into Norman Mailer's thirst for the "hip," and thence, by a curious turn, into some of the early forms of cultural and political protest against bureaucratization and the corporate state — by Kerouac, Ginsberg, and Dylan.

Though it might not have admitted it, this stark, demanding liberalism fed on

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American cultural residues — the lean, rambling virtues of the old republic, the musical solidarity of the black church and other religious and folk traditions, grass-roots populist revolt, urban immigrant labor organizing — and these in turn gave it its special moral resonance in its encounters with its regnant, errant Camelot cousin.

How quickly those wellsprings spoiled and ran dry! It was a corporate liberalism that eviscerated them, draining their myths and rites of passage in its structural transformations of our political economy, misdirecting young people's valor and hopes, that so many young Americans then struggling to come of age came unstuck from honor and community instead — bitterly, often violently, irredeemably. It is surely one of history's harshest ironies that so much courage and carnage are demanded of us for so little gain. Whether or not one accepts Morris's portraits of complexity and of history's long, majestic waves of demographic and economic change, impervious to political will, it is impossible to close this book without rueing what the movements of the 1960s became, a clashing of ignorant armies by night. But it is precisely in the depths of that recognition, I hear Morris saying, that quintessential liberalism regenerates itself.

FREDERICK SIEGEL'S *Troubled Journey* comes as close as anything I've seen to tracking this theme of submerged traditions in conflict, though the writing is rather more punchy than poignant, a salutary corrective, perhaps, to twilight musings. His argument is that the long struggle between partisans and opponents of the New Deal and its wrenching changes in the fabric of American liberalism is just now coming to an end, as basic shifts in our political economy undermine the broad American middle ground over which the battle has been fought.

In Siegel's panorama, defenders of small-town Jeffersonian virtue, precariously allied with elements of big business under the banner of free enterprise, are arrayed against patrician cosmopolitans like FDR and Dean Acheson, who in turn allied themselves with immigrant laboring masses craving opportunity and justice through government action. Along the way, the small-town "America-firsters" become internationalist anti-Communists and corporate bureaucrats, but the dream of eventual return to a safer, simpler America still animates them. The New Deal legacy undergoes its own permutations, too, as its neoliberal critics have been quick to note, but the essential themes of jobs and justice remain.

At least until now: the first camp (and many upwardly mobile escapees from the second) is passing into a white collar professionalism increasingly distinct from the second camp, which is rapidly becoming a hapless army of the working poor and unemployed. The broad, permeable "working-middle class" of the postwar years no longer buffers — and joins — the top and bottom of society in the old fitful American consensus of aspirations.

For forty years, however, the two older camps were locked in struggle for control of the American consensus, each wreaking revenge on the other for its moments of eclipse: McCarthyism is the revenge of the first camp for its twenty years of impotence under Rooseveltian tyranny; the rebellions of the sixties are in part the revenge of the New Dealers and their children for McCarthyism, Nixon, Eisenhower's amalgam of Main Street and the board rooms. And so on, through Nixon's comeback, the liberal Watergate coup, and Ronald Reagan's return to Main Street. It's as much a narrative of political theater as of actual policy, for the underlying trends toward a corporatist welfare state seem to have their own momentum — Morris's "long waves"?

Nevertheless, political theater runs deep, as our musings about the movements of the sixties have suggested, and Siegel's account of the whole postwar period is compelling:

> Republicans, inconsolable over the loss of China and bereft of alternatives short of nuclear war, poured vitriol over Acheson, the man they loved to hate. . . . With

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the fevered attacks on Acheson the ordinary props and costumes of the national political stage were stripped away to reveal the white-hot anger and unleashed frustrations of nearly twenty years of Republican exile. Acting as much to punish their enemies as to revive true Americanism, the Congress was turned into a living theater, a psychodrama in which senators and representatives felt free to spin out their wildest fantasies of homosexuality, intrigue, and treason, all of which were said to lie behind the New Deal.

Clearly, though, if the party of memory spun out such fantasies in debate, polluting Jeffersonian virtue in witch-hunts and repression, the party of hope soon acted out many of those fantasies in the flesh, confirming the conservatives in their darkest fears of "immorality" and "treason." Whether a second Reagan term embodies an intensification of unspent conservative revenge, or whether we have truly drifted away from some of the old dichotomies, remains to be seen.

If we have, and if the terms of the debate have been changed, what will have become of the essential American consensus, with its pendulum-like swings from the invocation of tradition to the celebration of pragmatic rationalism? With his theme of "unraveling" and his own paralysis of interpretation, Matusow suggests that the liberal ideal which once animated and moderated that consensus has been spent. Morris, on the other hand, seems to embody and to enliven what is supposed to have been lost, and is guardedly optimistic. Siegel finds ominous portents in underlying economic change: "The middle is dropping out of the American job structure," with dire consequences for the ideal which has held the nation together. My own fear is that the movements of the 1960s represented the last spasms of a cultural and political vitality, a liberal idealism, in whose absence we are now living, as a nation, on borrowed time.

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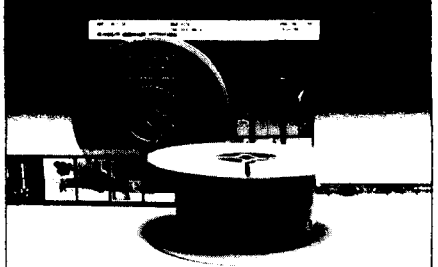

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Will the real Martin Guerre stand up?

THE RETURN OF MARTIN GUERRE
Natalie Zemon Davis
Harvard, $15, 162 pp.

Stephen Wagley

THE STORY of Martin Guerre is a simple one, at least as far as the facts are concerned. In 1548, he deserted his wife, Bertrande de Rols, his family, and the village of Artigat in the foothills of the Pyrenees. Eight years later, a man claiming to be Martin Guerre appeared in Artigat and was acknowledged by Bertrande de Rols as her runaway husband. The Guerre relatives accepted him too, until he demanded an accounting of Martin Guerre's property. A lawsuit followed, and then a criminal prosecution, the Guerres claiming that the man who had returned in 1556 was an impostor named Arnaud du Tilh. Just as the Parlement of Toulouse, at the advice of the examining judge, Jean de Coras, was about to aquit the accused, the true Martin Guerre appeared to reclaim his wife and property. Arnaud du Tilh was hanged at Artigat in 1560.

Martin Guerre actually counts for very little in this story. The memory of Arnaud du Tilh lived on in Artigat, and Jean de Coras — fascinated by the inventive peasant who had misled him and by the enigmatic Bertrande de Rols, who had accepted Du Tilh as her husband for four years — wrote up the case in a popular pamphlet. The story is set out for us anew by Natalie Zemon Davis.

Fascination describes Davis's attitude as well as Coras's. How could Bertrande de Rols have acknowledged Du Tilh as her husband? Was she misled by her feminine weakness? For four years? Or did she play a double game, coaching Du Tilh to play the perfect husband Martin Guerre had failed to be? How could Du Tilh learn his part so well that he convinced the people of Artigat and the judges of the Parlement that he was Martin Guerre? How could the skeptical Jean de Coras be so mistaken in weighing the evidence?

Identity is a central theme in this tale, most obviously the identity of Arnaud du Tilh. He clearly had little difficulty in taking the identity of another man, in living his life, in playing husband to Bertrande de Rols. She accepted his claim to be her husband, and so did the villagers, or most of them. Martin Guerre returned finally as Fate, the man with one leg come to exact retribution, a peasant Ulysses, though hardly a heroic one. Linked with identity are the parallel themes of honor and loyalty — especially on the part of Bertrande de Rols — and mobility.

On the evidence Davis presents, the peasant world of the sixteenth century was hardly as static as we would like to believe, hardly as fixed. The Daguerre family of Navarre had pulled up stakes in the early part of the century and moved east to Artigat, adapting themselves to the customs of a quite different community, even changing their name to Guerre in the process. Martin Guerre found it

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easy to slip over the mountains to Spain and begin a new life. This was a moderately fluid society of little though real mobility, both geographical and social.

Even the religious contentions of the Reformation touched Artigat. Protestant, and especially Calvinist, ideas about marriage and conscience and repentance may have influenced Du Tilh. Jean de Coras was certainly favorable to the Protestant cause (he was lynched by a Catholic mob in 1572), and may have felt sympathy for the intelligent and clever Protestant peasant who claimed to be Martin Guerre. On the other hand, three years before *Tametsi* (Trent's decree on licit weddings), this may be simply another case of "peasant experience in manipulating popular rituals and the Catholic law on marriage."

The story of Martin Guerre is more complex, then, than the recital of the facts might lead us to believe. It is the complicated story of identity and mobility, of honor and loyalty, of peasant community and Protestant sympathy that Davis sets out so well. This book may serve as an accomplished and excellent introduction to a type of history (in France, the study of *mentalités*), a way of looking at the past that tries to account for the numerous influences and motives — social, economic, political, religious, personal — that moved the characters in this story. In her brief and elegant narrative, the author shows herself particularly adept at using historical sources, even one so biased as Coras's *Arrêt memorable*, to reconstruct the world of Coras, of Bertrande de Rols, and of Arnaud du Tilh. Du Tilh charmed Bertrande de Rols, and he charmed Coras; now his ruses and seductions charm another. Fascination stands at the beginning of the story, the story of Natalie Zemon Davis as much as the story of her subjects. It is her genius to draw us into that fascination.

REVIEWERS

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In brief

WEST WITH THE NIGHT *by Beryl Markham. Northpoint Press, $12.50, 293 pp.*

"Contemporaries describe [Beryl Markham]," wrote Judith Thurman in her biography of Isak Dinesen, "as a creature totally without fear and rather arrogant toward her own mortality." I can easily believe it. She also wrote beautifully. Hemingway reported in a letter to Malcolm Cowley that Markham "can write rings around all of us who consider ourselves writers" — and it was the discovery of this mention that led Northpoint Press to reissue this minor classic, first published in 1942.

"When I had no specific destination," writes Markham of her youth in Kenya, "I always ran as fast as I could in the hope of finding one — and always found it." One can believe that too. One of aviation's early pioneers (she crash-landed in Cape Breton Island attempting the first nonstop flight from England to New York in 1936), Markham's memoir dances with good stories magically told — of a supposedly domesticated lion named Paddy who took a bite (or two) out of her, of hunting wild boar with Nanda tribesmen and elephants with Winston Guest and Baron von Blixen, of her wild thoroughbred's tolerance of a "straw-haired girl" (from the horse's perspective), of winning races at the Nairobi track, of the death of parrots, beloved farms, and men, and above all of Africa, mystic, wild, a sweltering inferno, "the last vestige of a dead world or the cradle of a shiny new one," to Markham, "just 'home.' " And never dull. She is still there, I am told, very much alive in her eighties. This memoir reads like Lindbergh's *Spirit of St. Louis* and will delight anyone who loved Dinesen's *Out of Africa*.

DAVID TOOLAN

Commonweal welcomes letters on subjects treated in its pages. Letters of not more than 250 or 300 words naturally have a better chance of being published.

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